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**Sample essays 2017**

**Wesleyan University**

**I Write David Sauvage**

**Please tell us something about yourself (approx. 500 words).**

Like I said, I'm inept. I don't tie my shoelaces. I don't understand seat belts. I can't change tires. I can't cook or fish or dance or sing or act or lie. I don't see how a plane can stay in the air or how it can land. I don't know how to paint or sculpt, and I can't take pictures unless the camera beeps. I'm about as practical as a socialist and as self-absorbed as, well, a writer.

I am a writer.

That means I sit alone for hours on end, eyes bloodshot with red coffee stains. It means I run my hand through my hair intellectually, fawning over the character I've just created. Pretty soon, there's sweat on my forehead (brow, if you prefer) and then on my fingers, then the keys. I rub my hands against my shorts. I push the chair back. I clap. I whisper an obscenity because I know I can get away with it. My eyes close. I think. I realize that the story must turn a certain way. Or I understand that the word "antisocial" is clearer than "misanthropic." I see something I hadn't seen before. My fingers twitch, and then it's there in front of me.I've written a story about a character who feels the need to bite his own thumb. I feel so enthusiastic about this awkward fiction that I needlessly decided to put the word "bite" in italics. Another character I own taps his spoon against a glass. I tried to have the rhythm of the story match the subtle tapping of a spoon against a glass. The character has to be able to breathe in his surroundings. He lives there, of course.

The "catch" to working with my own character creations is that the more fascinated I become with these imaginary people, the more indignant I can become towards real people. I can fall into the repetitive trap of feeling as if I could have created this teacher or that friend. As a result, I have heard people describe me as discourteous, ungrateful, and, condescending. When I make an attempt to change behaviors, it can often seem superficial, and I alienate people who matter to me.

But, when I find myself quiet and listening, nodding or shaking my head in agreement or in anger, when I find myself across a table from somebody who speaks authoritatively but openly, when I find myself at best challenged and at worst intimidated by a character who actually exists outside of my head, then the condescension, the rudeness, the writer's ego, disappear, and I become fascinated. I try to remember everything said, and everything I thought of at the time. I want to take the person home and describe him or her until I run out of ink. "Antisocial" truly is a better word than "misanthropic."

The characters in my writings are real to me also. I know them well. They stomp around in my head until I express them, and then they linger still. It is this lingering that convinces me over and over again that I am a writer. It is my love of the charactersand who they representthat convinces me that I could one day be an excellent writer.

**My Time in France David Sauvage**

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

My father was born in a little village in the south of France called Le Chambon in 1944. In that village, 5,000 Christians saved 5,000 Jews, including my grandfather, my grandmother, and my father.

Last summer, I visited Le Chambon for the first time. I went alone, proud of my fluency in French, and proud of the fact that I was alone. I stayed in a little camp a mile north of the town, and everyday my cigarette-smoking French friends and I would walk to the historical village, plant ourselves in the wooden chairs of the local bar, and watch the older people walking by, smirking at us.

The days passed just as the days pass in the beginning of most short stories - slow, repetitive, pleasant. I would look at the stony buildings, noting the arcane architecture, wondering whether my grandparents had noted the same thing. I would look at the old faces of the village, imagining them 50 years younger, when they were the most simple, straightforward manifestations of goodness the world would ever forget. None of this however stirred me even enough to put a word of it in my journal.

I was then cordially invited to the house of the woman who had sheltered my father and grandparents. My father had alerted her by letter that I was in town.

When I walked into her room - and she had only a room - she was playfully mixing her own jelly. She jumped up, as much as a woman of 97 can jump up, and hugged me and kissed me until I shivered like a cynic. Skipping introductions, she hobbled over to a drawer and then over to me, carrying in her lacerated hands lost pictures of the village in the 1940s, of my father as a baby, and my grandparents as refugees.

Madame Broche then started crying, coughing out these words in French: "You are like your father. You are like your father. How I love your father!" It all seemed melodramatic to me, and I think I rather wanted to point at the jelly on the counter and laugh. Then she calmed herself by fumbling with the cross around her neck, until she said to me, "I know I scare you. But thank you for coming."

"Thank you," I said.

"For what?" she begged. The fact that she considered my coming to her door as deserving of a thank-you, and her saving my father as deserving of a silence, made me shake and stare into her tunneled eyes and wish and wish that she could understand the magnitude of what she had done for me. Then I smiled, then listened, as she spent the following hour telling me about her own children and how I was about as tall as her grandchild.

Madame Broche has since died. My father went to her funeral. I told him to tell her children - who of course are no longer children - that I had considered her brilliant, that she made excellent jelly, and that I was very thankful.

**Finding the Woman In a Girl Lauren Allison Hirshowitz**

**Write a personal narrative about an event that changed you.**

I watched in admiration as the gentleman in front of me hoisted my fifty-three pound backpack onto his head and began nonchalantly hiking over jagged rock, leading me through the village of Dogbadzi, Togo, where I would live for the next two weeks. The rest of my group had already been given their home assignments, and I now saw only their bright white skin ahead against the red sand of the mountain. Told to wear a long skirt, I had to divert my attention to my feet in order to avoid tripping over the dragging cloth. When at last I glanced upward, I was surrounded by several hundred Togolese who scrutinized my every move. I turned my gaze upward, searching for the base of my mustard backpack. Startled, I immediately felt the strong grip of a man's arms around my waist, an elderly, emaciated fellow with a silver beard falling to the middle of his chest, who was apparently intoxicated. He mumbled several words in Ewe, the local vernacular, which I could hardly comprehend. Attempting to be polite and urbane, I grinned and responded "Oui, Oui," concealing my trepidation. I was at once inundated with widened eyes and Ohs and Ahs coming out of the throng as each native patted my shoulder. I later found out that I had, in fact, agreed to marry the gentleman.

Finally, the gentleman carrying my knapsack deposited it in front of a red mud hut indistinguishable from its neighbors. He approached me, interlocking his fingers with mine as a sign of camaraderie. He pointed to the doorway. Its occupant obscured my view. The new figure was slightly taller than I, the hue of his magenta shirt radiating against his dark skin in the searing sun. He drew me inside and gestured for me to sit on a lone bench, the only object in the room. With a promising "I'll be back," he quickly left.

The crowd had dispersed, its remnants only two teenage boys who now stood propped against the wall beside me. Snickering, one boy leaned over slightly to peer down my top. In an attempt to conceal myself, I leaned over backwards, but a third boy had situated his head in the window behind me and now beamed as he successfully glanced over my shoulder. Too terrified and flustered to engage in conversation, I muttered any phrases that I was able to concoct and could plausibly communicate in broken French. I was totally and utterly unprepared.

I sat for what seemed like hours inside the hut. Eventually, my home-stay brother appeared. I stood up, ducking under the fence of limbs that had imprisoned me. The boys immediately left the hut. Torn between fear of the unfamiliar and exhilaration of being immersed in a new culture, I watched as my home-stay brother, Akotsu Komba, set two bowls for supper.

After dinner, we sat together as he flipped through my collection of CDs. Although a musician, he had never seen a CD and was dumbfounded at the array of musical styles available to an American. Still unable to decipher his unique French-African patois, I asked Akotsu where he slept. With an informative nod, he smiled, "Here." I posed a second question: "Where will I sleep?" Again, he said, "Here." At that instant I was stunned. After several moments, I sat overwhelmed by anxiety. I tried to maintain an open mind. For the first time, I felt alone and trapped; I was petrified.

I cannot deny the consternation with which I slept that night alongside Akotsu. Essentially, I had two choices: remain with Akotsu, or seek out a more emotionally comfortable situation. Although fearing the awkwardness of the situation, I decided to stay.

I committed myself to becoming a part of the Dogbadzi people. Excited and thirsty for Togolese culture, my initial anxiety faded. I harvested corn, helped cook, washed clothing and taught mothers to braid long hair. I wanted only to saturate myself with Dogbadzi customs. In our spare time, Akotsu and I exchanged stories. I introduced him to cameras, flashlights, snow, skyscrapers, and powdered lemonade mix, and he to me a community where every member of the village was either a brother or sister in spirit. When night fell on Mount Agou, I would crawl into my sleep sack as Akotsu retired to the other side of the bed. Fatigued after a long day, I looked forward to a deep sleep beneath the heavy rain on the tin roof.

My sixth night in Dogbadzi, I noticed a newly knit white blanket spread neatly across the mattress. A blanket for Akotsu, I presumed; he slept nude. When Akotsu crossed the threshold of the bedroom, he pointed it out to me as if I had not noticed. I complimented its beauty and intricate weaving. Raising his voice slightly, he muttered an interrogative "Oui?" Puzzled, I responded, "I do not understand." Akotsu then explained that a white blanket was placed on the bed of a woman as a symbol of her last evening as a virgin. My heart stopped. His tone was neither callous nor insidious but conveyed a sense of hope. Thunderstruck, I could not believe that such a situation had occurred. I quickly attempted to fabricate an inoffensive response through which Akotsu could understand my reason for rejecting him. I asserted that, generally, Americans do not commit to marriage until in their twenties, and I was only fifteen. That night, for the first time, Akotsu did not sleep in his own house. When I awoke the following morning, he waited outside the doorway so that we could tend to the crops as we had done each preceding dawn.

Even today, people to whom I tell this story often say that I made the wrong decision and should have left Akotsu's that first evening. Although faced with a complex decision, I know that I chose correctly. The choice I made grew out of respect for, and desire to, plunge into Togolese society. I cannot deny that a part of me wanted to take the easier alternative and leave, but what would I have gained? I decided that nothing would be learnt nor lived unless I tasted it all; and that is what I did.

**Fairness and Justice Anonymous**

**Discuss some issue of personal concern, and its importance to you.**

Fairness is a quality that I try hard to embody, and I admire those who demonstrate the impartiality necessary to be just. But people often mistake impartiality as the defining characteristic of someone who is fair. Empathy is more essential because it is necessary not only to understand but to be invested fully in a situation in order to render a fair judgment.

About a month ago I encountered the first critical situation that required me to question what it meant to be fair. Two of my classmates created and showed a video that poked fun at some of the racial stereotypes affecting minority students. The video sparked deep divisions as students expressed strong opinions judging its content, context, and significance. As co-head of Another Perspective, Dalton’s diversity group dedicated to discussing issues affecting students, I felt an obligation to facilitate constructive dialogue that would allow the various factions to meet. During our first meeting of about one hundred students, I was distraught over how best to be fair. I had my own opinions: that school is not the place to attack peoples’ identities; that the very nature of the film as offensive towards some meant that everyone should feel upset; and that no one has the right to tell someone else that they should or should not be offended. I wanted to side with people who shared my equally “right” views. But I had seen the futile efforts of others as their tried to assert their opinions and explain why they were right. So I held my tongue. Instead, I ran the meeting asking questions and forcing people to consider and explain to others how and why they felt the way they did. Although we did not “fix” anything at that time we began to sort out exactly what our problems were and how we could go about solving them.

What I came to realize was that truly being fair is much harder than illuminating the “right” way of seeing things. It would require me to give up my short-term desire to impart my “right” way of seeing things in favor of mutual understanding, and long-term progress. Fairness means loving and respecting your peers enough to see past the short term. In caring about the well being of a community, which in this case was my school, I had to be objective and put aside my inclination to favor people who shared my view. My responsibility as a leader is to create an environment encouraging participation, and ensuring that the most important factors are addressed and their significance understood. Hopefully with this strategy the group will come to the “right” conclusions. It isn’t about the tendencies that we have to favor one position over another, but the necessity to empathize – and not just sympathize – with both sides. And so unequal treatment becomes unnecessary as you learn to embrace those who hold adversary opinions and begin to understand what makes people think the way they do.

**Sticks and Stones Anonymous**

**Indicate a person who has had a significant influence on you, and describe that influence.**

When my younger brother, James, was five years old, Jack Nierman bit him while they were playing in our favorite playground. I was sitting atop the monkey bars when I saw it happen. I swung down and pushed Jack away, then dragged my screaming brother over to our babysitter, Lethia. James didn't want to tell anyone what happened, so I did it for him. Even at the age of eight, I wasn't about to let Jack get away with what he'd done; it wasn't fair.

We spent a lot of time together in the playground. James developed a habit of collecting anything that resembled a weapon; sticks ("swords") were his favorite. I had to employ a great deal of negotiation to convince him to leave his sticks on the sidewalk in front of our apartment building. But I did what I had to, and I was the only one able to persuade him to part with his weapons. I started my distraction even before we rounded the corner. I always promised James that our doorman, Frank, would protect his sticks until we came back outside.

As we got older, and the park was no longer cool enough, James and I spent increasing time together indoors. Though he could be grouchy and shy around other people, James was an entertainer at home. Whenever he was sullen, I'd beg him to imitate Austin Powers or his Australian camp counselor, Rusty. Nothing could keep me from doubling over with laughter whenever he put on a show.

I went to sleep away camp for three years before James joined me. When he first came, I paraded around, introducing him to my favorite kids and counselors, and made sure that he was having fun. Though at first he resented my social meddling, soon he was waving me away from a circle of girls crowded around him. I didn't stop checking on him to make sure that everything was going okay, but I felt happy that he didn't need me anymore to have a good time. I still indulge his shyness every once in a while, especially at Starbucks. James hates ordering his own coffee, and I don't mind doing it for him.

James and I share a room that is divided by a partition. As a result, our homework is done in close quarters, and we can always hear each other. We are very different; James is fidgety and needs a little Jimi Hendrix to settle down, but I like to work without distraction. He also tends to easily become overly-stressed when he doesn't understand something, whereas I try to be methodical when approaching things that are unclear. I love the struggle of learning - I am more successful when things are difficult, and challenge has been the most valuable part of my education. Some nights, it felt like I spent more time helping James with his homework than doing my own. I can't stand seeing him struggle when I know that I can help. Even when my parents try to get me to do my own work, I know that his is more pressing, and I don't mind staying up late.

By far, my favorite place to accompany James is to any clothing store. James absolutely detests shopping, and it is the thing that I am most worried he won't be able to handle when I leave home. The idea of looking in a store for things he likes, then trying them on, and ultimately making decisions about what he needs is intolerable to him. But when he's in the dressing room, furious as I pass more things over the door, I laugh at his silliness, and he laughs at himself, too.

**Homecoming Anonymous**

**In his autobiography A Long Walk to Freedom, Nelson Mandela writes, “There is nothing like returning to a place that remains unchanged to find the ways in which you yourself have altered.” Write about an unchanging place to which you have returned. Explain how you have changed, and what you discovered about yourself.**

As I was part of Chicago, I thought Chicago was a part of me. It seemed as though nothing could extricate my Chicagoan heart, any more than tame my native accent. So when shifting vocational winds drove my family to Bethesda, Maryland, I thought the bond would hold. Five years later, when another gust promised to return us to our Midwestern homeland, I presumed the transition would prove seamless; after all, I was just going home. Yet once I returned, the city did not recognize me.

At first, I thought the Windy City failed to identify me because I was outside the context of my family. Although we had decided to return to Chicago, we had not secured a residence, and the start of Junior year lurked just past Labor Day. To attend the initial days of school, I moved without my family and boarded with my great uncle, Maynard. Aside from a room, he cushioned me with little else. However, through his detachment, I encountered an unprecedented liberty that demanded responsibility as an upkeep, and I learned skills varying from the operation of laundry machines (previously confusion captured in metal), to the science of scheduling a day. After two months, my immediate family joined me, and we inhabited our new domicile. But a family, or lack of one, cannot hide a personality.

Perhaps it was my shift from student to teacher that expanded my character beyond recognition. Before I left, I was a swimmer only, but upon my return, I spent my Saturday mornings as a swim instructor. I helped toddlers in their pursuit of the elementary strokes, while ultimately feeding them confidence to confront future challenges with. The habit was not exclusive to swimming; I also tutored students in flute. The trivial delight I once derived from performing a pretty piece was replaced with a deeper exuberance gained from a student’s confirmation, either through a flawless stroke or an ornate Sonata, that I had embellished the world; that through my care, some facet of life was ground a little finer.

Maybe the demands of the countless coaches I encountered throughout my peregrine swimming career had all compounded, and swelled inside of me until I reached a totally unrecognizable form. Their critiques rolled over me, flattening me into a breaststroker, next a distance swimmer, then foisting me into the mold of an Individual Medley swimmer. During my junior year my team presented me with the “Macho Man” award, and though I wish I could credit bulging muscles and an intimidating glare, my profile will testify that the trophy was actually a tribute to my willingness to swim for the team, rather than for myself.

It could have been that moving to Maryland and back had thrust me with situations that forced my adaptation. The year before my migration eastward, I began to play the flute. Because I started the instrument one grade later than the rest of my Lab School classmates, the director had me spend the band period practicing in an office by myself, until I could produce a sound no more offensive than the other “musicians”. I kept practicing, and I eventually graduated from my private room to the band class. Then we left for Maryland, and I took my flute with me. I joined the school band, and continued practicing and progressing, until I gloriously claimed first chair of the sophomore band at Walt Whitman High School. I thought I finally knew what course my life would take, when my schedule stabbed me with a sobering fork. To allow sufficient time for studies and swimming, I would have to forsake either music or my freshly developed passion for journalism. After much soul probing, parental lectures, and several teary counselor conferences, I chose journalism. While music mainly provided me with emotional expression and entertainment, journalism both provided aesthetic satisfaction, and allowed me to articulate my views to a larger audience than possible through music. Thus I returned to Chicago with a pen instead of a flute.

Returning to my birthplace revealed several ways my character had evolved, in a light that was only visible through the sequence of emigration and repatriation. Learning to live independently, propelling others with my own knowledge, tolerating the ever-contradicting commands of different swim coaches, and painfully abandoning music for print, all supported my purported maturity. Yet, could such intrinsic aberrations really cast me from a city’s familiarity? Maybe I just grew taller.

# Nice, Nice, Very Nice Anonymous

**Please write a personal statement.**

Please write a personal statement.

The day Kurt Vonnegut died my friend Becca called me crying. “So it goes,” I said, and we chuckled in spite of our sadness. We had become devotees of Vonnegut since our introduction to Cat’s Cradle two years ago, and had long talked about holding an appreciation day at Kailua Beach. I suppose his death acted as a catalyst, for we finally pushed aside our societal obligations and planned what would become one of the best Saturdays of my life.

Becca and I walked down to the beach as the sun rose over the water. There was no satire in the silhouette of friendship we formed against the ocean, yet I felt that swimming was a Vonnegut-worthy way to begin our day. Sure, he poked fun at society and religion, and even laughed in the face of death, but I think that above all, Vonnegut valued love. And for me, love took the form of that moment. Friendship and swimming fill me with a happiness so complete that it needs no other fuel.

We could have swum all day, but our intellectual pursuits pressed us onward. After a quick snack of fresh mangos we made a pilgrimage to the library, where we checked out, with the exception of Cat’s Cradle, every Vonnegut novel that we had ever read and a few that we hadn’t. We scoured the library for that beloved book, but the catalog informed us that our search was futile as all twenty-three copies had gone ‘missing’. This aroused our suspicions, but we understood how the temptation of owning such a book could outweigh the moral obligations of returning it. Cat’s Cradle condenses humanity into precisely everything that I wish to fill my ponderings with: love, war, religion, truth, and the absurdity of life. Vonnegut poses more questions than he answers, but pondering answers isn’t half as fun or as satisfying as pondering questions anyway.

With stacks of thought-provokers up to our chins, we headed towards our favorite spot on the sand. As we flipped through Slaughterhouse Five, Becca and I considered the true importance of the phrase “So it goes.” Vonnegut’s passing was a great loss, but death, when boiled down to its essence, is just another form of change. Our entire world is temporary, but the writing that Vonnegut left behind has made him a little less so.

No other writer yet has made me so simultaneously disgusted and delighted with human existence, while making me laugh at both. As Becca and I tenderly closed the books and our day, our stomachs growled loudly. I marveled at the oddity, for I was unmistakably full.

**Joy Anonymous**

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

One hundred sixty-two days ago I was counting the days I had left to live. “Impression: Large right ovarian mass with cystic appearance periphery and solid tumor in the center…” I trembled as I heard every word of the MRI report that my mom had tried to hide from me. What? “Most likely cancerous.” The answer reaffirmed itself in the seven diagnosis reports by seven different doctors. A grip of ice froze me to the core. I bit my lips to force myself not to shudder, as I filed the reports back in my mom’s drawer.

My eyes were glued open as I stared hopelessly into the emptiness of each night, waiting to wake up from this cruel nightmare. But I didn’t. I wasn’t dreaming. Everything I valued in my life had suddenly become trivial to me, for my whole life was slipping away. I understood why my mom had tried to persuade me to stop practicing volleyball or studying for the SAT. And it was clear why my mom had suggested that I should spend the two days before surgery donating my savings and favorite clothes: she knew that this could have been my last chance to do so. And despite shivering deeply upon the word ‘death’, all I could do was to hold my tongue and accept it.

While my mom and my brothers ran up and down the hospital, requesting the safest method for my surgery the next morning, I prayed. Left alone on the frigid bed of the hospital room, I picked up a small Bible that was sitting beside the remote control, as though I were a Christian and the waiting Bible was mine to be read. I didn’t know anything about God, but in the very first page I turned to, Jesus said, “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.” It seemed awkward and futile for a Buddhist to pray, but in those last moments of my life, all I had left to hope for was to believe in believing; believing that a miracle would happen.

Being wheeled into the operating room, I smiled, holding back my tears as my family reassured me, although I knew I might not return. I slipped into unconsciousness. As the whirlwind pushed me into the darkening abyss, somehow I held on tightly to that glittering ray of hope. After eight hours of surgery, I awoke to hear my surgeon exclaiming in astonishment, “She had that one-in-a-million chance that the MRI report had projected an inaccurate cystic appearance!” A miracle had happened.

I did not know if my prayers really made God take away the cancerous cyst. And even if it was not God, I was lucky; very lucky to be given a new life.

With the same curiosity that led me to read the MRI report, I decided to go to church for the first time. To my surprise, the warm welcome and passionate smiles I received completely disarmed the anticipated anxiety of being in an unfamiliar situation. My new friends’ honesty, unconditional compassion, and eagerness to help people who they have not even seen, are contrasting to the familiar societal competition within even close friends who fight over honors or wealth. There, though I have not found an absolute answer as to whether God is my life savior, I have been introduced to a true happiness. And this happiness gives me more than enough reason to be engaged in the church community service activities.

My wound is now reduced to a dried scar, which still cautions me to remember that I could have died or been undergoing chemotherapy and become a lifelong burden for my old mother. Most importantly, the experience reminds me not only that I am very lucky, but also that many people are not as lucky as I. Now that I have been given my chance, it is my turn to give.

Sixteen Sundays ago, I persuaded my family and new friends at church to visit patients at national cancer institutes. I felt ashamed for ever being so selfish, never having tried to understand these patients; instead I had been bored when I was invited to these kinds of community service experiences. I once thought that it was impossible for someone like me, who aims for excellence and success, to have enough time for such activities. I did not believe that just visiting patients could be any help, because we could not lengthen their lives. But now, I understand that a day I can devote to them cannot be compared to a second of happiness felt by patients who are living with cancer. Seeing the faces of despairing patients being cheered momentarily by my visits has inspired me to be there every weekend. Every night, I pray for these patients to be able to confront the inevitable, peacefully. I am blessed to have feared the same, for without experiencing it, I would never have been able to appreciate the happiness of giving.

At school, I find myself smiling at my former rivals, because just being able to go to school was more than I had ever hoped for 162 days ago. No longer do I face the life-threatening necessity to always be the top student in class. I didn’t recover quickly enough for the volleyball season this year, but cheering on the bench was enough for me because a new member was in tears when she learned there was an unoccupied position. This experience has changed my definition of success, extending it beyond the means of my academic transcript, to the joy of being alive and the joy of giving.

**The Synergy of Music Anonymous**

**Recount an incident or time when you experienced failure. How did it affect you, and what lessons did you learn? Please write an essay (250-650 words) on the topic selected. You can type directly into the box, or you can paste text from another source.**

My fingers pirouetted up and down the fingerboard, spiraling faster than the notes running through my head. Every white callous and bloody blister had led up to this moment, as I could feel all those hours of repetition, struggle, and stumbling finally beginning to pay off. Approaching the most difficult measures of Elgar's Cello Concerto in E minor, my body braced itself for an onslaught of notes. A tongue twister for my fingers, the menacing measure had always been a source of frustration and difficulty, a part I had always struggled to surpass in every single concert preceding this one. But even with the constant fear of my past performances needling the back of my head, I finally felt my fingers soar over the crescendo, tiptoe through the pizzicato chords, and emerge triumphant at the end of the phrase. I had done it! I had actually succeeded! But just as my heart started to slow down and relief washed over me, the unimaginable happened. I couldn't feel my fingers.

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IASAS was what my year of practicing the same song had been for, as I adored the pleasure of being able to spend five days with other musicians, all of whom shared my passion for music. I had chosen Elgar's cello concerto for this same reason: to display my technical skills through one of the most prominent cello concertos ever published. However, my choice had initially been received with rejection. My cello teacher claimed that the song was too risky, since its modern aesthetic could be regarded instantly with either adoration or disgust. Yet, despite this warning, I persevered. Sure, it was technically and musically challenging-but how could I turn down the piece I had fallen in love with when I had first picked up the cello? In the weeks leading up to my IASAS performance, my focus narrowed down to one section in particular. Indeed, those elusive lines kept me awake at night, possessing my fingers to dance even when I wasn't practicing. Initially, it seemed that no amount of practice could make the tunes coming out of my cello resemble the ones of Yo Yo Ma or Jacqueline du Pré. But after weeks of diligence, I became more agile, and the timbre from my cello sounded more confident. I took these signs as rewards for the almost inhumane amounts of time I had spent on those eight measures, and felt positive going into IASAS that my hard work was going to pay off.

\* \* \*

Shaking from shock, I stood up and calmly told the adjudicators that I couldn't finish the piece, for my hands had been seized by a cramp. As I fled the audition room, tears welling in my eyes, I reflected on what went wrong. While I'd mastered the section that plagued me most, I'd also made a cardinal error. Thinking that the rest of the piece would be a walk in the park compared to the tempest of controlling those short measures, I had neglected to practice the piece as a whole. And yet, I realized, this is how many of us approach life in general, concentrating on the smaller problems and thinking that by improving one aspect here, another there, we will become perfect. Sure, systematically improving ourselves is natural; however, it's also important to see the larger picture. Had I simply played the song to master that one section? Or had I played the song because of its overall beauty? This was the question I was forced to answer that day at IASAS. Today, I still struggle with little sections. But at the same time, I've learned to never forget the piece as a whole. Whether it's in volunteering, swimming, or toiling over a biology final, I maintain a perspective that never forgets the next note. After all, that's the only way to keep on playing.

**My Own Teacher Anonymous**

**Describe a problem you’ve solved or a problem you’d like to solve. It can be an intellectual challenge, a research query, an ethical dilemma-anything that is of personal importance, no matter the scale. Explain its significance to you and what steps you took or could be taken to identify a solution.**

According to tradition, every Chinese New Year children receive lucky money in red envelopes from older relatives and friends. In my toddler years, finding the crisp, red envelopes embossed with gold characters to be aesthetically superior to and more valuable than the worn and wrinkled bills they held, I habitually kept the envelopes and returned the money. Yet as I learned the function of money in society, it still seemed magical that we handed pieces of old paper to a department store clerk, a street-side food vendor, or a toyshop owner in exchange for winter coats, roasted yams, or a plush tiger twice my size. My parents explained that money could be used in exchange for a seemingly limitless variety of goods because everyone simply agreed on its value. This only resulted in more questions, to which they could only say that they worked in film, not finance, for a reason.

School was no better at providing answers. Economics is not a core subject. My lack of exposure and access to the field of economics made it an enigma to my mind. Completely shrouded in mystery, it beckoned me, enticingly, to explore it. My curiosity in the subject soon reached a level I had never before experienced, having previously had access to all the information I needed. I began to unconsciously tune-in to the news at any mention of the economy, and found myself drawn to Internet articles that focused on commerce and finance. I did not understand most of what I heard or read, and online explanations only introduced entirely new sets of alien terms. Yet the less I understood about this puzzling concept of "economy", the greater my desire became to learn everything about it.

Eventually, fragments of information, of which I understood little, had become insufficient. Though I had no one to teach economics to me, there was nothing stopping me from teaching it to myself. And so, one spring afternoon in the eighth grade, I marched, authoritative and determined, into a used textbook store and demanded to see "an economics textbook please." I was subsequently shown the five vast, ceiling-high shelves, packed with textbooks, in the economics and finance section. In my excitement and haste to miraculously fill my brain with economic knowledge, it never occurred to me that I would have to choose a textbook from an endless array of options. Overwhelmed, I spent the afternoon browsing the shelves, leafing through books of all shapes, formats, and sizes, pretending to know exactly what I was looking for. Eventually, I settled on*Economics: Principles and Policy* by Alan Blinder. That summer, I embarked on my quest to learn its contents. Nearly every page introduced foreign words, concepts, and notation I had never seen at school, requiring me to re-read many passages several times to understand them.

The experience of learning on my own was even stranger. I did not have a teacher to clarify confusing sections of the textbook; my teacher *was* the textbook. I missed the nine different perspectives I could glean from my classmates during discussions; the textbook's opinion was the *only* opinion. Yet, I also found this new approach to learning liberating. No longer feeling obliged to focus my time and energy exclusively on information relevant to "the test," I was able to further research or gloss over topics depending solely upon my preferences. It is quite ironic that I then chose to take a test, standardized, no less, on macroeconomics. This test was a milestone for me, a way to track my progress and understanding after nearly one year of weekend and vacation studying, and certainly was not the final stop. Instead, I hope that it will serve to remind me of my original, zealous curiosity in economics, which still propels me, even today, through the challenges, to delve deeper into the broad scope of the discipline. I cannot imagine stopping.

**A Fairy Tale Anonymous**

**Recount an incident or time when you experienced failure. How did it affect you, and what lessons did you learn?**

It was 2 AM. As my fingers moved across the keyboard, words sprang onto the surface of my laptop screen like drops of tar. Word count revealed that I had only written 500 words today. Unacceptable. Stephen King averaged 2000 words a day. I had to keep up. Disregarding how the stream of words popping up on the screen contradicted the story line, I continued to write.

My desire to write a novel had been born out of envy. I felt painfully ordinary in comparison to my classmates who each seemed to possess a ream of talents that outshone my own. I craved a success, and I thought writing a novel would be a suitable solution.

I began the endeavor with enthusiasm, titling my work-in-progress *The White-Haired Princess*. Even though the characters I came up with were beings of another world, by fleshing out their physical features, fears, and histories in my mind, they became satisfyingly human: Aia, the brazen queen, Sarah, the eerie princess, and Geoff, the cruel prince. I wondered what sort of childhood could have made Geoff calloused enough to kill forest animals in front of fragile Sarah, and how much of Aia's harsh treatment of her daughter contributed to her meek disposition. Late at night and early in the morning, I would huddle over my keyboard pondering these questions. The world was submerged in sleep, but I led myself to a realm teeming with animation. I was enthralled by my daily discoveries.

However, it was not long before the novel-writing sessions became less than romantic. My impatience for success soured my ventures into the fairytale world: why was I trying to figure out what Aia liked eating for breakfast when there was a plot that needed furthering before I could reach the ending that would catapult me towards success? The writing sessions mutated into long periods of frustration: I typed and typed and typed without interludes of contemplation. I was no longer bringing my story to life but merely churning out senseless words.

There was a painful contrast between the miserable final days of forcing myself to type the would-be novel and the jubilant sprees of flying fingers that I had experienced at the beginning of the project. It served as evidence that the desire for the end result can be the very force that prevents the achievement. A genuine heart that enjoys every step of the process is just as valuable as success, for how can authors be lauded as masters of writing when they feel no attachment to their own stories? Ultimately, both the process towards success and success itself merge into a means for me to understand myself. If I had continued to plow through writing sessions, the sad heap of pages that would have resulted would be meaningless. What gave the stories meaning was that my mind had danced with various story lines, throwing some of them away but learning lessons from all of them. Their waltzes brought forward ideas that resonated within me until my imagination became clearer than it ever was before.

The end of my experience with *The White-Haired Princess* was not the triumph I had imagined, but it was an experience that satisfied its conception: I no longer felt anxious comparing myself to my classmates. An achievement is not valuable because it is a giant trophy, but valuable because it symbolizes dedication to the project that brought it into being. I had not gotten my hands on the trophy, but I had discovered the key to what makes a trophy so coveted. It is, at its best, a symbol of who you are and where (imaginatively, in my case) you've been.