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**Sample essays 2023**

**Boston College**

**The Absurd, The Prom Anthony Haddad**

**In the space provided below, or on a separate sheet if necessary, please describe which activity (extracurricular and personal activities or work experience) has had the most meaning for you, and why.**

In ninth grade, we learned that Voltaire's Candide was a satire on society, expressed through the absurd extremities Candide must face. In "What Befell Candide among the Bulgarians", 'our hero' must 'run the gauntlet six and thirty times through the whole regiment, or to have his brains blown out with a dozen musket-balls'. Two years later, as Prom Committee President, such a dilemma hit close home. But who was playing this cruel satire on my life? Any path I attempted seemed near-fatal. Many were disillusioned about this "First Ever Prom", few were dedicated or willing to help, and people bluntly said it could not be done.

After all, though, we lived in suffocating Saudi Arabia, where a heavily publicized COED gathering, moreover, a dance, would be impossible. So was my call to empowerment. I became Prom for six months. I inhaled menu plans, and exhaled decoration themes. I spoke royalty items, and heard ticket sales. Never before had I ever felt a task so personal, so symbiotic, so me. May 30th, 2002, "Midsummer Night's Dream" was ready: the lamps twinkled, the tiered fountain sparkled, and the enchanted garden exuded life. It was the most ecstatic and gratifying night of my life...As I ushered my classmates out, one of my senior friends, with tears in her eyes, begged me to extend the Prom just another half hour. All these sleepless nights, this hardship, this aggravation, seemed somehow to be worth it. For one whole night, I felt fulfilled, achieved, accomplished... Satisfaction glared me in the eye: I delved in it.

**An Academic Affair Anthony Haddad**

**This personal statement helps us become acquainted with you in ways different from courses, grades, test scores, and other objective data. It will demonstrate your ability to organize thoughts and express yourself. We are looking for an essay that will help us know you better as a person and as a student. Please write an essay (250-500 words) on a topic of your choice or on one of the options listed below. You may attach your essay on separate sheets (same size, please). Also, please indicate your topic by checking the appropriate box below.**

Oh, you naughty girl you! NO, I can't spend the night, I have so much work to do. I'm sorry...look...I promise I'll make it up to you on the weekend. I won't even go see my friends on Friday. Yeah, I promise. Sure, of course I think about you...I think about you all the ti-what!?! Now you think I'm cheating on you? Listen, don't make this any bigger than it already is. I said I got some important stuff to do, and I'll see you later!

I just had a talk with her. Didn't go too well...Well what more does she want from me? Three hours a night isn't good enough? But wait! Allow me to clarify things! This is not some petty teenage love quarrel, but a gruesome, drawn out war I have engaged in for much of my life. The "significant other" I argued with above is not a girlfriend, but uniquely, a void filled in my life by....a BED: that's right! A bed! I'm unfaithful to sleep! I cheat on sleep like an adulterous husband, like a tango dancer that has had one too many partners! I "sleep around": just about anywhere- in the car, on the lunch table, in history class-I'm high on life while simultaneously, nearly every individual component within my environment has a near sleep-inducing effect on me. But I realize now by the near end of my high school term, I wouldn't have wanted it any other way.

"Are you O.K. honey? Lately, you've seemed a little hara-kiriish-well, I mean, you're way up there with your potential...you do have a lot on your plate." Many concerned teachers have approached me with this same, almost robotically preset inquiry. My Algebra II/Trig. teacher, apparently with a bachelor's in psychology, called me in once for a one-on-one. From his line of questioning, it was obvious he was looking for the tell-tale signs of suicide...No, I'm not suicidal! I have a wonderfully loving family, great friends, a great school: life is grand! I'm involved in so many things because that's the only way I like it. While it may be somewhat painful the night of, the next morning, I'm amazed at having finished my math homework, written an English essay, and memorized all my lines for the play. What I do not like, though, is the word potential..."Calm down man, you're way ahead of your potential" someone once said. A potential attempts to impose a calculated box around one's achievements, limiting their possible accomplishments. If I am convinced my potential is an '8', my every effort from then on will be to achieve a '9'. Potential is an individual's promise to one's self: one of excellence-to strive to achieve, to succeed everyday, to encapsulate yourself within a shell by morning and break through it by night. Only a quitter has a fixed potential.

I must say now, this whole 'cheating-on-sleep' idea is somewhat exaggerated and meant for comical effect. Surely, I am not an insomniac, nor am I narcoleptic, and I don't intend on changing in college and making up for this 'lost' nap-time. But all I know for sure is this: if commitment to excellence comes at the expense of 'cheating-on-sleep', file me for adultery, 'cuz I'm not changing!

**College Diet Renata De Sousa**

**Topic of your choice**

Why do most diets fail? As a veteran dieter with nearly eight years' experience, I have acquired enough knowledge to answer this question. Those who readily jump into new diets are looking to realize possible goals through impossible methodology. At age ten, I stumbled upon some propaganda which would form the foundation of my first "diet", titled Encantos Magicos (Portuguese for "magic spells"). That little book instantly fascinated me with the possibility of acquiring money from just following simple daily rituals. With each page turned, I felt a growing anxiety to finally begin my "Magic Spell" diet, yet only after hours of persistent "pleases" and "why nots" did my mother relinquish enough of her common sense to buy the items my new diet required. With several candles, essential oils, feathers, amulets, and a chalice in hand, I began casting all sorts of spells to acquire a hundred reals (Brazilian currency which would be the equivalent of 33 dollars), an amount equal to a million in my young mind. Although I devoted a great deal of my time to my diet, it seemed all efforts I spent on casting new magical spells inevitably ended in failure, since those hundred reals never found their way into my pocket.

Undaunted by the results of the magic spell diet and others that had reached the same end, I decided to venture into yet another new diet. At fifteen, I believed going on a strict diet of punk music could forge a friendship between myself and another individual with an affinity for the genre. I immediately conducted a search on Napster for punk songs and proceeded to download as many as my hard drive could hold. Every day I listened to several new songs and educated myself on a variety of punk bands and the songs each of those bands had recorded, in case my commitment to the diet were to be tested. Although I discovered there were some punk songs I enjoyed during the diet, I felt mostly apathetic towards the genre. My false interest and enthusiasm couldn't mask my general indifference towards punk music and the other individual saw through the facade. After three months of devotion to the punk diet, I lost the free space on my hard drive and most importantly, the respect of a possible friend.

Even though I have attempted a multitude of other diets aside from the magic spell and punk diets, the failures and disappointments I have experienced won't wane my persistence. Whereas my most elaborate spells could not bring me a single penny, I discovered that performing a few extra chores for my mother had an opposite effect. I was also able to establish meaningful friendships when I based them on real shared interests, for I learned fake connections are the quickest to disintegrate.

In addition, I have been introduced to new experiences I would have been averse to otherwise, which the five remaining punk songs on my hard drive can attest to. Hence, the true reason behind the failure of diets is the triumph of individuality, for each one of my failures cleared a new path in my search for self-truth. I'm not quite sure which diet I will undertake next, but I have been anxious to try that college diet.

**"All That Matters" Anonymous**

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

No matter how old I grow, the meaning of friendship has always remained the same - loyalty, sympathy, understanding, and unwavering support. I learned this lesson early in life, back when my best friend's trampoline was the cornerstone of my social life. It was there that I learned the value of friendship and the understated importance of simply "being there."

For something we depended on so much, the four of us certainly abused that trampoline. Its face had been scorched by summer days, caked in pollen, covered in leaves, and buried in snow. It had even tolerated a sticky rainbow of popsicle drips from days when we would lie on our stomachs, lazing in the sun.

That trampoline heard its share of secrets, and it managed to keep them all. It stayed updated on who had crushes on whom, and kept quiet when the aforementioned boys jumped on with us. It served as our meeting place for devious plan-making, as well as our drawing board when we went back to square one. More importantly, it was a place to lie there together and do nothing - sweet, blissful nothing.

One summer, the trampoline played an even more important role than usual - the summer that Elizabeth's father died. The week before he passed we sat on the trampoline in silence, broken only by the crying of the suffering springs, indistinguishable from the crying of suffering girls. We offered Elizabeth our support, with minimal success. The only thing that helped was our presence on the trampoline, together, as we had been a million times before.

That was also the summer I moved away - away from popsicles and secret plots. Although there was nothing I could do about it, I felt guilty for leaving my childhood friends, especially when it felt as if they needed me most.

So I came back. Last year I revisited the trampoline (and, of course, the friends), and we remembered the giggles, the smiles, and the gossip. When we had finished catching up, we found ourselves in a reverent silence, like we had been years before. Looking down at that trampoline, I realized one very important detail: sometimes simply "being there" is all that matters.

**Thursday Mentoring Anonymous**

**The admissions committee would like to know more about you in your own words. Please submit a brief essay , either autobiographical or creative, which you feel best describes you.**

Every Thursday, my classmates and I mount the small yellow school bus and travel to South Orange. While some students run onto the fields, dressed in soccer gear, I sit back and anxiously wait to arrive at the foster home. While others rush home to start their homework, I teach younger children the multiplication table, or the difference between nouns and verbs. As soon as we arrive, a herd of smiling children run to the door, greeting our familiar faces. Tiny arms attack us, grabbing our waists as we step foot inside. The kids eagerly grab their backpacks and proceed to the reading room, where they argue over who they wish to work with. Finally, the young boys and girls settle down with a grin, each one paired with a dedicated student from the Montclair Kimberley Academy. Every child, surrounded by books, paper, and writing utensils, sets off to work, mentor by his or her side.

I move across the room, and barely have a chance to plop down onto the comfortable couch, when a little girl approaches me. Shyly, she holds out a worn out copy of a Dr. Seuss story, and jumps up onto the couch. Asking her if she wants to read to me, the girl shakes her head gently, as the beads on her braids make a rattling sound. The usual compromise is made. I read one page, and she reads the next. I listen patiently to the girl, who stumbles across a few unfamiliar words. When my turn comes, I read slowly, knowing that she might get discouraged by a faster reader. As she resumes reading, I take a quick glance around the room. The children focus on their homework, while my peers eagerly help. I hear one boy counting out loud: nine, eighteen, twenty-seven, thirty-six. Another girl practices cursive, and one of the older boys proudly tells his mentor about the grade he earned on an English test. Occasionally, someone will interrupt all the hard work, by darting loudly into the room. While some kids complete their homework and start reading, others work diligently, hoping to finish before we say our goodbyes.

I smile and resume reading, realizing my peers and I are turning these children into better students, and at the same time, becoming role models for the youngsters. I enjoy interacting with my classmates outside of school, and the Thursday experiences we share bring us closer. The many hours we spend at the foster home allow us to create long lasting bonds with the kids. With a sigh of satisfaction, I wait for the girl to finish reading the last page, and close the Dr. Seuss book. The hour flies by every week, and the children frown when we start to gather our belongings. They beg us to stay longer, clutching on to our legs and refusing to let go. Although the children only see us on Thursdays, they have already become attached. They slowly walk us to the door, wishing for the power to turn back time. The little boys scream at us, threatening to be mad if we do not return the next week.

The bumpy bus ride home gives me time to think. Maybe I did not score the winning goal at the soccer game, or finish my paper two weeks in advance. Instead, I taught someone how to spell chalkboard, and in return, I discovered how much I enjoy working with children, and how my experiences at the foster home turned me into a more dedicated person. Helping others could not be more gratifying, especially knowing that my time has made such a difference. My Thursday afternoons will continue to be important to me, even after I finish high school. As I go off to college, I am certain I will be respectful of individual differences, and more open to interacting with a diverse group of people. I will continue volunteering to help children, and hope to further this dedication by becoming a physician.

The wind blows through all the open windows of the school bus, sending shivers up my spine. We are almost home, but I keep thinking back to the foster home. The image of the little boys replays over and over in my head, with their disappointed faces. I can still feel the powerful grasp of the girl who read almost an entire book by herself above my knee. I feel as though the eyes of the shyest boy, who silently begged us not to leave, are still looking straight into mine, and my promise to him that we will all return next week rings in my ears. I lean back, knowing that today could not have been any better. Of course I will return next week. I wouldn't miss it for the world.

**Pressure Anonymous**

**Common Application: Topic of your choice.**

"Pressure is the amount of force exerted on an object by the air above it," my physics teacher explained. I jotted down the definition but then began to think...if only it were that simple.

So what is pressure really? Pressure is juggling three AP classes with three varsity sports. It is practicing five nights a week with one of the best youth soccer teams in the country and then studying during the car ride home. It is missing weeks of school while traveling around the world to play the sport I love while not missing a single assignment in class, but most of all, pressure is what you make of it. I have thrived in the classroom and on the soccer field because, when handled correctly, anxiety-filled situations can bring out the best in a person. In the words of George S. Patton, "Pressure makes diamonds."

Academic excellence is most often achieved in pressure-filled conditions. The more ambitious students in school naturally feel some pressure to excel. When this pressure is coupled with the demanding work of advanced placement classes, students have two choices: they can meet the challenge, or they can crash. Fortunately, I have been able to master academic pressure and use it to my advantage. By maintaining a confident, "bring it on" type of attitude, I convince myself that I am ready for any challenge. The sooner the deadline, the harder the material, and the more strenuous the work, the more motivated I am to excel.

Much like in academics, high pressure situations can promote athletic success. There is always some nervous excitement before an athletic competition, but those who can harness this pressure are most likely to succeed. A prime example of thriving under pressure can be seen in my trip to Ireland last April with the regional soccer team. We played in a tournament where we were fortunate enough to reach the finals against England. With the score tied at two, we were forced to go to a penalty shootout to decide the winner. Representing my country in front of more than 2,000 screaming fans and knowing that if I missed we would go home with a silver medal instead of gold, I volunteered to take one of the shots. As I approached the ball, I blocked out the fans and the weight of my teammates' expectations and reminded myself that this was only a game. I then stepped forward and coolly struck the ball into the back of the net.

Technically speaking, "pressure is the amount of force exerted on an object by the air above it." However, pressure is also a force that ignites my best academic and athletic performances.

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**Watch Me Callie Adam**

**Common Application: General topic of your choice.**

I'm sure I have the visiting team's attention by the time I finish my first lap around the soccer field. Standing in a circle, contemplating my presence, they venture guesses quietly, "Cross country? Lost? Girl's soccer?" Finishing my second lap, I can always feel them looking at me, trying to put the pieces together. I am running the laps by myself because today, like many other days, I have missed my team's warm-up when classes at school ran into practice. Although it is amusing to hear the other team's bewilderment, by the end of my warm-up I welcome the security of a group. The boys, discussing whatever had happened in school, include me with friendly greetings. I join 'my' team with a feeling of satisfaction; glancing at the visitors, I think, 'Let them ponder that for a while.'

Now the other team stands, and stares across the field trying not to look too obvious. Their coach barks, "Concentrate! Move! What are you looking at?" But chances are he knew long before he even got to the game. "It's just a girl," he says.

I knew it was risky accepting the opportunity to play with a boys' team. It is something that could have had resonating effects on me, as I am in high school, and passing judgment on people seems to be something my age group has a knack for. The team isn't my high school's either so school pride and loyalty are potentially sensitive issues as well. However, when I consider my passion to play and improve, this seems like a perfect opportunity.

I have proved myself to my own adoptive team and coach, but because others do not know me, scrimmages are always the most eventful, not to mention trying experiences. When we begin to play, the opposing team's initial confusion is to our advantage since I have no challenges. The defender who is my mark, assigned to keep me from the ball, doubtfully attempts to tackle while his exasperated coach yells. The other team's slow start doesn't always last, and in an effort to save their dignity in the face of accusations, opponents frequently resort to more than soccer, and the games become quite entertaining.

I have learned that I cannot expect my reputation to precede me; I must start over every scrimmage with the faith that after playing the ninety minutes I will have earned the respect of a fellow player. I like to see that the effort I put into each game has made me an equal. Regardless of the score, I count a game as a victory when I can look evenly at my former mark and he can sincerely, albeit quietly, say "Good game."

Every new experience requires me to earn my reputation. In the future, I expect that some first impressions of a young girl aspiring to become an engineer will have to be proven wrong, just as I strive not only to win a soccer game, but also to win my opponent's respect. I have to answer many questions about my decision and interest in playing with the boys; most people, confused, wink and grin, and ask if I really even play. These are the people who do not know me yet, and normally, smiling, I invite them to a game- "watch me."

**Experience Anonymous**

**What experience or encounter do you bring to the diversity of college?**

When I started high school, like most freshmen, I was unsure of what I wanted to study in college. I knew that I needed a major that I was interested in and excited me. It had to be something that drove me to be better everyday than I was the previous day. It needed to be something that I naturally excelled at academically. I wanted to make a difference and be remembered.

To accomplish this goal, I took the hardest classes that I could in high school, preparing me for whatever path I would choose for my future. I noticed that I was an analytical learner, and performed especially well in my math and science courses. When I started sincerely considering majors in my junior year of high school, I looked very closely at the fields of science and business. I read all the books, magazine articles, and online journals that I could, and I talked to many adults about their college and career choices. I was becoming more interested in business as a choice. That is when I decided that I was going to need real, hands-on experience before finalizing my decision. I looked up summer programs at universities across the country for a program that would best fit my needs and interests. I discovered that the two-week, Summer Experience, pre-college program at the University of Notre Dame was just what I needed to help give me direction. I was accepted into the program and my first choice of classes, the business courses.

As my parents and I made the flight, I began to wonder what my experience would be like. Would the classes suit me? How would I interact with students from across the country? Would I like living in a dorm, eating in the giant dining hall, and going to the classes? Would I fit in to college life in general? Once I arrived on campus, I realized that this program, and college, was going to be much better than I had anticipated. I loved the campus life including living in the dorm, having a roommate, making friends with everyone in my hallway, playing Frisbee in front of the dining hall, and all the people there in general. The classes were much more interesting and informative than I was anticipating. In fact, the second week of classes was an interactive business simulation where the class was divided into teams. I was the Chief Executive Officer of my team's "company" and we came in second in the cumulative competition. Overall, it was a very rewarding and worthwhile program. More importantly, it solidified my decision and desire to pursue business as my major. I now know that I want to pursue this path in my life at Boston College because it has one of the best undergraduate business schools in the country and an excellent location and environment.

**From Charity Case to Friend Anonymous**

**Common Application: Evaluate a significant experience and its impact on you**

Harlan County, Kentucky, deemed the poorest in the United States, hosts the Capuchin Youth and Family Ministries' (CYFM) Appalachian Mission Program every July. For the past two years I have been a participant. The first year I worked as a manual laborer, constructing a deck, along with five other people, for a family who resided in a trailer with only half a roof. Although the family suffered from an unmistakable absence of material wealth, I learned their mindset was not one to pity, but rather one to envy.

After five days of toiling under a sweltering sun, the emotional connection I made with the family was far greater than the physical connection made with about fifty pieces of plywood and a rubber-handled hammer. The sense of appreciation and gratitude I felt from the homeowners inspired me in a way I had never experienced before. Titus and his family impressed me in that I was no longer satisfied with just tending to the needs of their home, but I was captured by their personal needs as well. By the end of the week, I remained hours after the workday ended to chat with Titus' son, Wesley, about everything from school, to girls, to the University of Louisville basketball team (he was a huge fan). The development of such a tight-knit relationship between my work group and Titus' family became remarkably heartening.

I had heard stories from people I knew who worked at Titus' house in the past about the final day's festivities, but I still did not know what to expect. From 7:45 AM to 3:00 PM it was business as usual. I finished painting the railing we had built around the deck, and then proceeded to finish tiling the kitchen floor. When finished, I wiped my brow and braced for good-byes. Titus' ten-year-old daughter, Chelsea, came tearing down from the chicken coop with a river of tears running down her cheeks. She grabbed me by the hand and tugged me towards her room, urging everyone else in my group to follow. As I walked through the door, Chelsea pointed at the wall to the left of her bed. Engulfing her wall were the handprints of everyone who had worked on her house since she was three years old. In red, blue, green, and orange, each person had left their mark in their own unique style. I guess they believed through a handprint, their image would forever be engraved in the minds of its observers. As I dipped my hand in the same vibrant neon paint I had handled earlier, I realized what I had done for Titus was not a service for a poor family, but a favor for a friend.

From that trip, I ascertained Titus did not desire material wealth in even the slightest way. This is something that greatly perplexed me, since the cutthroat, business-oriented world is what I grew up believing was the road to happiness. That one could live contentedly in unquestionable poverty was something I could not fathom before I was lucky enough to meet Titus. Before I departed South, I desired to help those in need while remaining as detached as humanly possible. I soon learned service wasn't in the physical work, but rather in the meaningful relationships established through it.

**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.

**Piano Conquest Anonymous**

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

It was a crisp, clear January day in Park Ridge, New Jersey, a few miles from the middle of nowhere. Before me stood an imposing sight: Schubert’s Impromptu. With a length of fourteen pages and a required foundation of meticulous technical skills, this composition would be a challenge for even the best pianist. And I was no pianist; I was a rhythmically challenged, stubby-fingered sixteen-year old girl. Nonetheless, I began the daunting process of sight-reading.

Black, white, black again. The notes were passing by with unexpected ease – but no! I meant to play A flat, C sharp, B natural, and E sharp; I had underestimated these seamlessly placed notes. My teacher urged me on. I felt utterly incompetent. The melody was exhausting but breathtaking. My fingers began to stiffen; my forearms tingled with pain, and my head was waiting to explode. I soon began to regret that I had chosen Schubert’s Impromptu over Bach’s Prelude. As I pushed forward, measure after measure passed me by. I stopped to inhale deeply, in a hopeful attempt to exhale my frustration and mistakes and inhale even the smallest trace of my teacher’s perfected skills. “Schubert isn’t for everyone,” she consoled. I curtly responded that I would be fine and proceeded onward.

Pain tore through my fingers as they climbed over each key. Black, white, black again. The next note flittered in and out of my view, pushing me forward with only dim hopes of success. Time wore on, and the pain faded into numbness. Each note followed the other in a grim succession. With each passing measure, I became more agile in my ability to sight-read. The end grew near. Suddenly, I heard my teacher, whom I thought had fallen asleep, whisper “You’re almost there.” My vigor restored, I pushed on more quickly than before, until I reached the last note. In one final act of endurance, I closed the score.

However, the journey does not end there; it never does. The end of the first journey was only met with another that would last for three months. Those three months were filled with endless hours of a ticking “Energizer Bunny” otherwise known as a metronome, a book defaced by every color in the Crayola box for the sake of musical perfection, and the loss of countless hours of sleep to my beloved Schubert.

Although I may verbally complain about how much I despise playing the piano, in the dark depths of my soul it is impossible to admit such an atrocity. There is nothing else that brings the rare satisfaction that perfecting a piece brings. During the process, disappointing not only my teacher but also myself, I continued to learn and to improve. There is nothing as marvelous as hearing myself play an impeccably constructed impromptu. And every time a piece is played the way it was meant to be played, not only does the music come alive, but also the pianist and the composer are able to, if only for a bit, live vicariously through the melody. There is something about bringing another’s passion to fruition. The grueling process of the initial sight-reading and countless repetitive mistakes drive me to the brink of insanity, but the very thing that drives me crazy also fuels me.

I am a pianist. I may not be the greatest of musicians, and hearing my friends and teacher play is often a humbling experience, but it is the disappointment and frustration that keep me going. I cannot stop until I have reached perfection.

Crescendo, diminuendo, crescendo again. Disappointment, humiliation, disappointment again. Black, white, black again. Perfection, failure, perfection again.

**Lesson Well Learned Anonymous**

**Topic of your choice.**

The black and white keys mesmerized me, as always. They were of another ancestry - Steinway – different from the Yamaha I owned; but as I sat on the meticulously handcrafted ebony bench, I felt at home. My hands floated effortlessly upward, and my fingers landed in their proper positions. A single twitch of my left pinky began the piece, and I filled Weill Recital Hall with one of Chopin’s melodious legacies. The dynamics were ideally executed, and the notes played with great precision; but as my fingers flew over the keys, my memory became foggy. As instantaneously as a sharp bee sting, my hands ceased all movement and my mind turned blank.

It had been a busier week than usual, and I had convinced myself that a few days without Chopin would be simple to recover from. After all, I considered myself highly proficient with the piece. Those few days turned into a week, and soon it was the day before the performance—but I had played through the song only a handful of times. I assured myself that it would not help to worry, and that practicing a few hours before the concert would be more than sufficient. In retrospect, I wish I knew that what goes around comes around, and by not practicing I was only putting my satisfaction with myself at risk. Success is earned and will only come to those who invest in achieving it. It is unfortunate to admit that practicing during the extra two hours of sleep I got could have rescued me from the embarrassment I felt that fateful day.

In about a month’s time, I found myself seated in almost an identical situation—except this time I had more confidence. Once again, I carefully placed my hands on the keys. Even though I felt anxious as I recalled my previous humiliation, I was certain about the outcome of this performance. Minutes later, my commitment was rewarded as applause filled the concert hall. In the end, I learned that talent is nothing without the dedication put forth to nurture the gift.

**A Newfound Nostalgia Katherine Perry**

**Describe an aspect of your childhood/upbringing that shaped the person you are today.**

Describe an aspect of your childhood/upbringing that shaped the person you are today.

In a navy blue Volvo station wagon my entire childhood evolved. Inside, memories rested alongside the hardened French fries and squashed fruit snacks that lined the plastic leather interior.

Growing up I had two older brothers. Brian was two years my senior, and we flat out did not get along. At the root of our constant fighting were our intrinsic similarities - we repelled each other like two homologous poles. Michael, two years older than Brian, was extraordinarily aloof. He was always a spectator during our petty battles, never taking sides or responding to the action. I often pondered how it was possible for him to ignore Brian's and my constant quarreling. In time I realized this trait was simply part of who Mike was, and we all loved him for it.

During family car trips we’d find ourselves playing our Gameboy consoles for ten minutes before breaking into complete sibling warfare. My father would try to overwhelm the cacophony with his newest Bruce Springsteen cassette, but his attempts were always futile.

Through the constant combat, my parents’ personalities shone through. My mother’s solution to all sibling-related problems involved an incredible amount of yelling. My father wasn't as vocal. Once the Boss had failed him, he'd opt to jerk the car to the side of the road and coolly stand outside until the battle ceased. This technique usually worked. Brian would direct his negative anger at his game of Tetris, Michael would lose himself in his Walkman, and I would stare out the window and daydream.

The car changed with the family, and as we acquired parts, so did it. When the Volvo approached its second birthday, my sister Erica was born. The meager five-seater could no longer hold our family and a fold-up trunk seat was added as a result.

The years passed, and like us, the Volvo began to age. The navy paint lost its luster and small regions of rust developed. Inside, empty juice boxes and X-Men trading cards lay preserved beneath the floor mats, creating an unintentional scrapbook of memories shared by my family in the car.

One subzero February day our car began its dissent to death. As we pulled out of our driveway something felt awry. The Volvo was making strange noises - it had finally trekked its last mile.

A short time later, we purchased a spacious new Honda minivan. No longer crammed in the backseat, arguments between Brian and I dissipated and finally ceased. We pretended to love the newfound maturity, yet in our hearts we all wanted to go back to the days of pulling hair and bickering to no end.

The Volvo represented our youth, and when it died, our childhood went along with it. From gummy bears and Gameboys had somehow evolved four children who had just about grown up. Now as I stand at the cusp of adulthood, I’d give anything to relive those days — yet I know this is an unreachable desire. Childhood is a one-way street, and there is no turning back.

**“Buenos días, ¿cómo estás?” Anonymous**

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

When my dad first began working in Mexico, I nonchalantly changed my schedule to include seventh grade “Intro to Spanish.” Naturally, I didn’t think twice about what would later prove a crucial decision—few seventh graders realize how such simple choices can affect his or her future. Now, a mere five years later, I realize just how important that choice was and how much it has affected who I am and who I will become. Choosing to learn Spanish has provided me with irreplaceable experiences which have given me insight into what I hope to achieve in the future.

My Spanish studies took me on a trip to Mexico City to stay with a family whom I had never met. After the first few rather awkward hours, my initial culture shock gave way to an undying respect for the hospitality of this family and the Mexican people. My “sister” gave up her room, sleeping on her brothers’ floor in order to make me as comfortable as possible. Her ten- and twelve-year-old brothers even went out of their way to include me in their habitual backyard soccer matches.

An everyday occurrence, trivial in most Hispanic countries, made me realize just how different the people and culture of Mexico are from those of the United States. At a routine doctor’s appointment for my “sister’s” uncle, we sat in the waiting room reading magazines and looking out the window of the hospital as we would in any other doctor’s office. However, when the receptionist finally called us in to see the doctor, I noticed what I had been taking for granted thus far on the trip: when the doctor entered the room, he did not simply say, “Buenos días” and proceed with his examination. He made a point to greet each person in the tiny room individually with a “Buenos días, ¿cómo estás?” as well as the usual Latin peck on the cheek. The expressions on the faces of the others remained unchanged as they turned their attention to the uncle’s checkup, but I, unsure of exactly what was happening anyway, sat in that doctor’s office in Mexico City silently swearing an undying love to the Hispanic people and their hospitable manner. All it took was one genuine greeting and kiss on the cheek from a complete stranger to make me realize just how much small gestures can distinguish a culture.

From my experiences with Spanish-speaking cultures I have learned that there is something fulfilling about understanding those who are different from me and trying to bridge the barrier that exists between languages and cultures. Although I have always aspired to be a doctor so that I may help people, my travels and education in Hispanic culture have made me realize that doing so may mean, not only continuing my dream of studying medicine, but also pursuing Spanish language and studies.

**Me in 1000 words Anonymous**

**(Topic of your choice) Write about yourself.**

I shop at the local thrift store often. I know its six sections of racks and shelves as if they were in my own closet. I don’t shop there for financial reasons, nor do I shop there for trendy fashion finds. I shop there for the stories the t-shirts whisper to anyone who listens. With a little luck, each piece of clothing sees years of a person’s life. The words “Sandy Plains Softball League,” or “Harrison High School Class of 1999” screen-printed on the front are the only look you get into the former owner’s life. The fun lies in the inference. Just as it is impossible to learn everything about someone from a t-shirt they wear, it will be impossible to learn everything you need to know about me from one essay. These are only the words screen-printed on the front of my t-shirt.

I am -----, and my name has too much thought behind it for a girl who likes to live life as it happens. You may call me Oxymoron. I am chaotic, as my curly hair suggests, but I have a near-obsessive need for organization of any kind. I am an optimistic skeptic. I am horribly opinionated and usually shy. I am recognized by both my all-capital-letter print and my elaborate script. I am the rock my friends rely on for support, but I am still a teenage girl, vulnerable behind any façade I choose for the day.

I love how music lets me let go of my worries and how it sometimes moves me so much I feel like someone punched me in the chest. I love all languages, mathematics included. I love knowing that neither the right nor the left side of my brain is controlling the other; I don’t stand for tyranny of the cerebral sort. I love the mountain towns of Sicily that let me know I belong somewhere. I love the city that lets everyone know they belong somewhere. I love my Irish mother’s Italian cooking. I love anything that is almost tangibly continuous, but I get bored sleeping in the same place for two nights in a row.

I believe that there is much to be said about socialism, and I believe in the democracy that our nation was founded on. I believe that employing someone because she is a woman or any other minority is just as bad as not employing her because she is; affirmative action has created a new kind of discrimination. I believe that when isolated, all things, including people, lack meaning. I believe in the importance of the individual. I believe in the necessity of attention to the Golden Rule, and I believe that at the heart of the same philosophy is selfishness. I believe in gay marriage, stem cell research, and a pregnant woman’s right to privacy. I believe that beyond the corruption of the Catholic Church, there is a set of standards that are worth believing in. I believe in the beauty of the written word, and I believe in both the destructive and the constructive influences of it.

I hate people who can’t remember my name, and I hate people who use it excessively. My name invokes a seriousness I don’t often like to know. I hate reality, and I hate fantasy worlds created by people who live their lives in fluffy white nothingness. Reality disappoints me too often, and fantasy worlds are for the naïve. I hate people who are different for the sake of being different. They are hypocrites that let society affect them as much as it does anyone else. I hate conformists who devour any sense of originality. I hate heights, bridges, and fire, although I do love candles. I hate people with irrational phobias. I hate commercials, flashing red signs, or people ringing your doorbell advertising their faith. People have a right to believe what they want to believe without being told that they will spend eternity rotting in Hell.

Finally, this metaphorical t-shirt is undoubtedly red; red is my favorite color.

**A Man of Convictions Eric Tracz**

**Try to fit who you are in 500 words. Anything allowed!**

I am well known for having many strongly held personal convictions. Whether people look fondly on my convictions or harness utter disdain for them is a completely different story. Some are seen to be outrageous, such as believing that dipping Wendy’s fries in Frosties is the greatest food marriage ever. Some are seen to be, at least to a limited extent, intelligent, including my belief that the loose criminal justice code used exclusively in professional sports can be largely attributed to its strong lobbying ties with the government. I have compiled three of my most popular and passionate convictions, which should be embraced or at the very least challenged by all.

My most controversial belief is my pro-conservative view of politics. Brian, my brother and a philosophy major at Boston College, claims to have “liberal tendencies.” As such, I can say that my “conservative tendencies” have been adequately challenged and forever will be. Let me begin my political rant by stating that liberals do not have anyone as attractive and captivating as Sarah Palin. Even my mom unintentionally bought a pair of glasses making her look almost identical to Palin. Who cannot help but go rogue? In an appeal to more intelligent audiences, I explain that conservatism offers better economic and social frameworks. Being Catholic, I believe that conservatism best represents the Catholic view of issues such as abortion and the legitimacy of traditional family values. Fr. Ober, my truly legendary AP Modern European teacher, enlightened us to the great economists of Ricardo and Adam Smith, who essentially paved the way to our free market system. Thus, I have come to the conclusion that conservatism is superior because it supports retaining and perfecting the free market system of America, which has shown to be durable and reliable throughout American history. In addition, I am a regular reader of BusinessWeek magazine and have started to delve into economic works, so I am somewhat well-read in the field of business and have a limited basis by which to make economic conclusions. My rant is done.

Speaking of convictions, I am sure that OJ is guilty. Sorry. I promise that my political rant and any mention of politics is over.

Coke is unequivocally superior to Pepsi. I have a valid and prized view of this issue because I have lived in Atlanta, the headquarters of Coke, and Cleveland, a hotbed for Pepsi distribution and consumption. Also, there are no drinks that I refuse to drink and only three foods I refuse to consume: Brussels sprouts, corned beef, and escarole. As such, I am not susceptible to strange cravings for one food and inexplicable disdain for another. After many years of analysis, I have concluded that Pepsi has the same properties as carbonized sugar water with a negligible hint of citric and phosphoric acid. Coke has a sweet taste, yet it also has a slight spice taste, which is simply undeniable. My verdict is that every savory sip of Coke is an experience. Pepsi is simply the drink for the unrefined and sweet-toothed. No wonder the majority of the schools I am applying to are located in Coke territory, also referred to as the South.

Lady GaGa is the best musician to ever exist. To begin, I believe that Lady GaGa is one of the most attractive women of the decade, a belief not so well received by my girlfriend. To put into terms even Descartes would understand—premise: Lady GaGa is the greatest artist of dance-pop—premise: and because dance-pop is the greatest genre ever—conclusion: therefore Lady GaGa is the greatest artist in all of music. Also, the mere fact that I am a male who even recognizes the name, Lady GaGa, further substantiates my conclusion. Lady GaGa’s presence is also felt in the dance world with her revolutionary dance moves, which I largely attribute to my world-famous dancing skills. Ultimately, the uniqueness and addicting nature of her beats and lyrics makes her tunes timeless.

Even though I have explained three of my most prominent convictions, I have many others that I feel passionately about. Should I go to the College of William and Mary, I will enlighten its community with my sometimes intelligent and largely humorous beliefs.

PS: I am convinced that Virginia is the best state in the Union.

**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.

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**Sandy's Lesson Michael William Bell**

**Describe a situation when you learned an important life lesson from someone you know.**

There is a special bond that forms between a dog and its owner. Sandy and I were no exception. That was why I wasn't really surprised when my mom told me the news. In a way, I already knew.

My family got Sandy when I was six, so she was a part of the family for as long as I can remember. She was like the sister I never had. When she was diagnosed with cancer, I was sad, but I wasn’t really surprised. She had not been the same for the past few months. The veterinarian told us that recovery was unlikely. It seemed that Sandy did not have long to live. I resolved to spend as much time with her as possible over the next few weeks.

The weekend Sandy died was cold and quiet. The house was empty except for my mom and me; my brother and my dad were both out of town. Sandy somehow knew that it was her time. Late Saturday night, she disappeared. I realized that she must have gone outside and began searching the yard. Just when I was about to give up, I saw her hidden under a ledge and shivering from the cold. As I approached her, a faint smile appeared briefly on her face until it was again replaced by pain. I picked her up and brought her inside.

Once Sandy was safe and warm, my mom and I talked about what to do next. Sandy understood that it was her time. She had gone outside to die. As hard as it was for us to accept that, we knew what she needed. I convinced my mom through tears that the best thing we could do for Sandy was to put her down. At eight the next morning, my mom and I drove Sandy to the vet’s office. I carried her into one of the back rooms. The vet told us that we were making the right decision and asked if we wanted to spend some time with her before she was put down. The look on Sandy's face reinforced what the nurse had said about it being the right thing to do.

At that point, I lost it. I cried harder than I ever had before. Saying goodbye to your best friend for the last time is never easy. Sandy was the best friend I could have had. She truly accepted me for who I was. Only rarely do people have the same loyalty or ability to love unconditionally. Sandy was therefore not only my best friend, but also one of my most influential teachers.

In her final moments, I don’t think Sandy had any fears or regrets. I think she felt only a sense of conclusion. Sandy accepted that she was part of the continuous cycle of life and knew that the cycle was moving on. In that way, she was smarter than any human. Because of Sandy, I have come to believe that life is a circle: we live to die and die to let others live. In that way, death is beautiful. It didn’t make it any easier to walk out of the vet’s office without her, but even then, I knew that Sandy’s last lesson was perhaps her most important.

**Home Run Kevin Tente**

**Reflect on an important experience in your life and what you learned from it.**

“Clunk.”

“Home run!” my teammate yelled, laughing.

I winced, trying to hide my embarrassment; a home run would have been great if I had been playing baseball, but I was at my first high school tennis practice, and instead of the ball ending up on the other side of the net, it ended up on the other side of the fence around the football field.

In my defense, I was not a tennis player. I had been playing baseball since I was five years old. When I started high school, I tried out for and made the school’s freshman baseball team, starting at third base. I was always eager to play, and it was a great experience to be an integral part of a team while supporting my teammates and friends throughout the season.

Sophomore year, I started preparing in January for the March tryouts for the junior varsity baseball team. I frequented the batting cages and learned to withstand the shock of hitting a baseball with a freezing aluminum bat. In March, I spent most of my time in snow-filled parks playing catch with friends. Before I knew it, it was time for tryouts, and I was looking forward to showing my coaches and teammates how much I had improved from the previous season.

After the first three days of tryouts, the coaches made the first cuts. My teammates and I waited nervously for the roster to appear on the door. When it did, I desperately searched for my name, but I never found it: I had not made the team. I was confused. I had always been told that if I worked hard enough, I could achieve anything. I felt like the last ten years of playing baseball had been for nothing.

I immediately decided that I was not going to spend the spring season feeling sorry for myself. A week after being cut from baseball, I went out for the tennis team. I had never played tennis before, but I knew the coach and had many friends on the team who all encouraged me to try it.

On the first day of practice, my friends walked me through a match and explained the rules of the game. I spent most of the practice chasing stray tennis balls that ricocheted off the rim of my racket, but I was having fun and enjoyed my teammates’ company. As the weeks went by, though, I came to love the game of tennis itself. I made the junior varsity squad as part of the third doubles pairing, and even though I was far less experienced than my competition, I did not get discouraged; instead, I found myself motivated to improve.

Over the course of the season, I watched professional tennis matches to pick up new techniques and strategies. In addition, every day after our scheduled practice, I went to the elementary school near my house to hit balls against the side of the building, a massive brick wall that bordered a concrete schoolyard. As the weeks went by, I could tell my extra work was paying off when I started making shots during actual matches that I never would have thought I could make. When the season ended, I continued to go and hit against the elementary school wall. My extra effort helped me physically and mentally; whenever I was frustrated, angry, or stressed, I started hitting and instantly felt clearer.

The following season, I was shocked when I earned the second singles spot. At first I was nervous because I knew playing at that level would require much more strength, speed, agility, and intelligence. In my first match, I quickly found that players at that level were all more than capable of hitting the ball and keeping it in bounds, so in order to win, I had to learn how to place the ball strategically out of their reach. I focused on improving in that area by going back to the wall every day after practice to perfect any new skills we had learned and to seek out suggestions from my coach. By the end of the season, I had won ten of my 12 matches. I worked hard to make myself a better player, and it worked. I am now eagerly anticipating my senior season to see what I can do.

Throughout my high school experience, I’ve learned many important lessons, but one of the most important ones is that even though there will inevitably be disappointments in my life, in order to succeed, I cannot let them get the best of me. Rather, I must keep moving forward to try new things.

**Diverse Identity Anonymous**

**Common Application essay on diversity**

“Dinner is ready!” Every Sunday a member of our family takes a turn choosing what we’re having for dinner, and today was my turn. My mother had prepared all of my favorite food, from foie gras to sea urchin sushi to satay. As we began eating, my mother asked me her favorite question: “What did you get on your tests this week?” I answered proudly, knowing that I studied the materials thoroughly and did well.

My mother then smirked, “Mostly good, but an A- in history? When I got an A-, my father would hit my hands with a ruler.”

“She tried her best, keep it up.” said my Father.

“This is why Indonesia never progresses, everyone lacks rigor. When my grandfather was here during colonization, he said the people were so lazy...” babbled my mother, and the conversation continued. It was the usual back-and-forth discussion caused by their opposing backgrounds, personalities, and values. After we finished dinner and did our Islamic prayers, my mother brought us to her room to thank our Japanese ancestors. My household was like a Chex party mix – a combination of many things.

Growing up in an environment filled with conflicting ideas taught me to be open minded: I am never afraid to try new things, to meet new people, to consider different ideologies, and to take advantage of random opportunities.

Sure, a part of me is similar to the typical teenage girl (I listen to Lady Gaga, and I like to talk about fashion) but another part is much more than that. I never limit myself to anything. For instance, when shopping for a 30 Rock poster, I came across a Miles Davis vinyl. I bought it, and now I listen to his albums everyday. Inspired by the movie New York Gangster, I taught myself how to throw knives, which resulted in a broken door and an angry mother. I also taught myself how to play the flute and create DJ mixes. Over time, I have become so multifaceted that often even my close friends state, "You still manage to surprise me."

Not only am I open to new things, I am also open to new people. While I am friends with many students from different cliques, I am also very close to faculty and staff throughout the school. I became good friends with Niño, our cafeteria’s cook, and I customized a stir-fry sauce that he then named after me – a sauce that my math teacher was addicted to and, once she met me, thought fit me perfectly.

Sometimes my impartiality gets me in trouble. For example in my Islamic elementary school, I got a week of detention for reading The Da Vinci Code and being curious about “dangerous Christian values.” Situations like this made me realize how lucky I am to have been exposed to different values and to have the courage to let myself learn new things. This tendency did not come out of the blue, but was a result of my upbringing that served diversity on a silver platter to me. Without it, I wouldn't have the will to read and contemplate the Qur’an and Nietzsche’s opposing thoughts. Without it, I wouldn't have the thirst to push my boundaries, leave my comfort zone, and enthusiastically embrace the diversity of experiences and people I will encounter in college. Without it, I wouldn't be me.

**Looking Past the Rearview and into the FutureAnonymous**

**How would your life be different in a different time period?**

Computers, video games, iPhones. Fuel injected, cereal box import rice rockets dominate the streets. Hybrid cars and green technology. Pop, rap and screamo. For better or for worse, times have changed. While modern applications serve their purpose, I like to imagine myself in a seemingly simpler time, with simpler things. Driving in my dad’s beaten down Toyota Echo, I can’t help but wonder: If I graduated in the class of 1972 instead of 2012, how would life be different?

As I imagine myself gazing out the window, cruising in a 1970 Chevy Camaro with Led Zeppelin II blazing from the stereo, life seems much different. Children are playing outside, riding bicycles, or playing board games. Gone are the mind-numbing television shows and video games of today. While I enjoy playing Xbox, watching Sportscenter and chatting on Facebook, the ‘70s embraced face-to-face interaction, social events and a greater sense of community. Furthermore, all the bands from my Google Music playlist would be around. I regret missing the opportunity to go to a Led Zep concert, or listen to Jimi Hendrix and Creedence Clearwater Revival live. My fascination with classic cars and classic music follow accordingly with my love of getting things done; I would rather do something myself, put in the hours of work, rather than take a handout—just like the artists of the past. The innovators of the late ‘60s and early ‘70s inspire me to put forth the legwork that has brought me academic and athletic success. Hendrix and Clapton’s electric guitars, Black Sabbath and Deep Purple’s hard rock, and the progressive rock featuring keyboards and synthesizers of King Crimson, Yes, and Rush, are all products of innovation – leading rather than following.

Muscle cars and Rock and Roll may have epitomized an era, but like The Dark Side of the Moon teaches us, “the sun is the same, in a relative way.” While I would love to experience the past, I never forget the conveniences of the modern era. Instant communication via text message, email, and social network is accessible in the palm of my hand with my Droid 2. A virtually limitless network of information is constantly at my fingertips, helping me research for my school paper, look up something for an argument with my friends, or simply browse and learn from millions of informative websites. International affairs are no longer fantasies from faraway lands; technology permits the global community to stay constantly in tune. Televisions broadcast in HD, and I never have to deal with a cheap eight-track tape, digital music on my computer and iPod. Even Muscle Cars are making a revival—I can buy a 2012 Mustang with better gas mileage, stronger engine, fewer emissions, improved safety and enhanced comfort.

The potential for growth, as a person, community, nation, species, comes hand in hand with innovation and progress. Humans have limitless potential to grow, create, and facilitate social development. While I would enjoy graduating in the ‘70s, I can only imagine how it will be in the 2070s. Although Pink Floyd and Cream may be antiquated things of the past by then, I intend to contribute greatly—keeping alive my teenage dreams and transferring them to a new generation, so they may experience not only what I had, but what my parents and grandparents had as well. By learning from the past, I am able to teach, grow individually and give back to others. Like the great innovators of decades past, I intend to create, lead, and accomplish.

Change happens regardless of desire, action, or preference. Just as time continues to tick, spring turns into summer, and people grow older, society is constantly in motion. Looking in the rearview mirror is a poor substitute for reliving a memory, and, most importantly, it distracts from the road ahead. Rather than bask in the memories of the past, I intend on blazing new paths forward, using the tools of today to make a better tomorrow.

**Excellence Anonymous**

**What is one quality about you that makes you stand out?**

Excellence: a virtue, an ideal, a lifestyle. Excellence has not only come to embody myself; my actions, from their very core, induce excellence. A misconception exists that success is an indication of excellence—in fact, excellence is an indication of success. Excellence is a quantitative and qualitative measure of ability, evaluated against expectations, standards, and prior experiences.

Character, athletics, academia, and societal interactions are all aspects of life in which excellence has become expected of me. Notwithstanding academic and athletic prosperity, my successes are not what make me excellent. What makes me excellent is my determination, ambition and courage employed in my feats of greatness. Mastery of the English language is not what makes me excellent: my endeavors to learn Spanish and Polish are. Being a contributing member of four state championship teams, does not make me exceptional, but the lessons learned during each triumph and how they have shaped me as a person do. The ability to play the piano, violin, and drums are merely the results, rather than components of my excellence; the hours spent practicing, honing my skills, illustrate the higher standard to which I hold myself.

Despite enjoying numerous accomplishments, my excellence is derived from the trials and tribulations which came before them. He who succeeds without adversity is no greater than those who fail. To whom much is given, much is expected; excellence offers an odd paradox in which the successful are never satiated, the accomplished are forever ambitious, and the triumphant continuously transcend all expectation. Concurrently, the pursuit of excellence grants greater gain than simply excelling. Losing in the preliminary trials only to return and win the final heat of a hurdle race exemplifies this idea. Coming back from preseason injuries to block a field goal, catch a touchdown reception, second the team in tackles and set an example for teammates despite unyielding and debilitating cramps prove infinitely more important than the losing score on the scoreboard.

By competing in all aspects of life, I not only set myself up to succeed, but I provide for the success of others. Leadership is the natural successor to excellence, and being captain of the track team cultivates this idea. By inspiring my teammates, the excellence I have come to expect is transferred to others. Most importantly, however, is the perception of excellence. When no effort is given, yet success is present, then excellence is still lacking; only when all effort is exhausted does triumph manifest itself, regardless of the outcome.

Excellence, above all, is a mindset. Aspiring to do greater than the day before, run faster than the previous race, score higher than the past test, relax more than the prior rest, and ultimately, live today more than yesterday, ensures that life is not wasted, character is learned, knowledge manifested, and accomplishment earned. It is with this mindset that I awake each morning, auspiciously aspiring for fulfillment, yet retire each night with humble acceptance of my successes, preparing myself for the fruit of the next day’s conquests.

**Words Speak Louder Than Actions Kathryn Gundersen**

**Topic of your choice, but it was specifically about an experience central to my identity.**

Just like many others, I've spent my life hearing the hackneyed phrase “actions speak louder than words.” Based on personal experience, however, I've decided that I disagree. I believe that words are magic. Not magic in the conventional sense; a much subtler form of magic, but no less potent. If used properly, words can be endlessly powerful, beautiful, and captivating, and have the ability to initiate so much more than actions ever could. I judge this by the way the power of words has shaped my own life, branding me and fostering a love of self-expression through writing that will never be extinguished.

My passion for words ignited at a young age, beginning with a desire to read anything and everything I could get my hands on. I devoured books, but soon came to realize that nothing was as satisfying as using and manipulating words in my own way. I still remember the very first story I wrote in my first grade journal, with a witch and an anthropomorphic pumpkin playing the protagonists. Today my writing defines an even more integral part of who I am.

Writing has taken me on numerous journeys, each of which has lent me countless pearls of wisdom and paved the way for endless self-discovery. My participation in National Novel Writing Month (NaNoWriMo) epitomizes these writing voyages, particularly my first attempt at the mere age of thirteen, with absolutely no idea what would come of such an endeavor. But my determination shone, with the pride of being able to accomplish something so substantial serving as my greatest motivation. To call this experience difficult is an understatement, but I found myself attached to the world I wove, the characters I created, and the idea of having a full length manuscript to call my own, so I kept on. After thirty lengthy days of writing, I reaped the reward I'd been looking for, putting the finishing touches on my very first real novel. From this experience I learned the benefits of dedication and perseverance, worked to apply them in other aspects of my life, and haven't looked back since.

Four years and three NaNoWriMo novels later, writing continues to characterize my life. I write to express myself, I write to prove a point. I write to make my mark on the world. But most importantly, I write to tell a story, whether my own or that of a fictional character who has come to inhabit my mind. Whatever the reason, I firmly believe there is no more rewarding way to spend my time.

For me, writing is sublime. My words describe me in a way that actions nor anything else ever will, playing a principal role in my own story. Guided by their brilliance I'll continue to strive to work harder and reach farther, because I seek to change the world with words. Without full knowledge of their magic, this would be impossible.

**Everything Happens for a Reason Kathryn Gundersen**

**Tell us about something you heard or experienced for the first time and how the years since have affected your perception of that moment.**

When I was about fourteen, my dad lost his job. He wasn't at fault; the hotel he worked at was in a poor financial situation, so fingers were wrongly pointed at him, the director of sales. The moment I heard I felt that my comfortable world was crumbling down, falling to pieces around me. My heard sank, my stomach dropped. It was too horrible to be real.

For a while, things were difficult. Suddenly my dad was no longer the superhero I thought he was, suddenly he became a mere mortal. I could see the dissatisfaction in his eyes at every waking moment; he felt that he'd failed us. Finally, though, the tide seemed to turn; the fledgling company he'd founded with a former colleague was hired to help a luxury oceanfront hotel get back on its feet. A contract was signed, an agreement made.

But it didn't last. After about a year the hotel owner severed ties with my father's company, terminated the contract, and refused to pay him a portion of the money he'd worked for. He was left without work once again. Thankfully it was only a month before he was able to clinch another sales management job in a Manhattan hotel. He had wonderful credentials, and his charismatic personality impressed everyone.

Fast forward to late June of this year. Once again, the hotel was ready to blame the sales manager for the tough times they'd been facing. He began interviewing for another job, and a few weeks later they told him he'd gotten it. That same day, however, they called him back, claiming something had happened and they could no longer offer him the position. No explanation. Just a minute-long phone call that nearly shattered him.

Today, my father is still searching for a permanent position. He's been back and forth to Texas since early October, working a temporary one. I only see him once every two weeks. Over the past three years, though, my perspective on these events has changed: my dad still is my superhero. He's taught me that even though the world is cruel, perseverance is the key to success. Since then it's become difficult to picture precisely the moment I found out, but for this I am thankful. Though I wondered many times how this misfortune could have befallen us, now I've come to firmly believe that everything happened for a reason.

**4'11 Forever Anonymous**

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

When my mom gave birth to me, I weighed in at nine and a half pounds and measured twenty-two inches. One could say I was pretty big for a newborn, but whenever I tell this story, it is soon followed by a: “And that’s pretty much when I stopped growing.” Ever since I can remember, and up until the eleventh grade, I had always been the shortest guy in my class. The problem with this, coupled with the fact that I’m a guy, is that people usually only respect people who look “scary,” i.e., tall and big people. And I mean, who was I going to scare at 4’11?.

Ever since I started school I have had to compensate for my height to get people not to take advantage of me. For example, when I arrived in my current school, I decided to try out for the tennis team, which had just won the championship the year before. When I went to the try-outs, the other kids from my class taunted me because they thought that my height made me weak and a bad player. However, they were very wrong; I made the team and we won the championship that year. This is the compensation I am talking about, and it is the reason why I believe I am who I am today.

I entered my current high school in the seventh grade. I was a small kid and knew about 10 kids from my class, which is a small amount considering we were 150 back then. However, even though I knew no one, I ran for class president that same year. Thanks to my personality and some campaigning from my 10 friends, my class elected me president. That was the day I realized that it didn’t matter how tall I was as long as I proved I deserved respect. From that day forward, my “struggle” (because we teenagers exaggerate everything) with height has given me the character and dignity with which I portray myself every day.

I still find it ironic, however, that everyone from my class, even the ones that I’ve physically outgrown, still call me “enano,” which is Spanish for midget. At first, I didn’t understand. I mean, I knew I wasn’t that tall but I was now average, so why were they still taunting me? It was some time later that I realized that they weren’t taunting me; they just remember me as the short guy who didn’t care that he was short when he arrived in school. Now that I am taller, I think to myself: why should I care now? So I embrace the irony and laugh at it, and at the end of the day, the fact that you can laugh at yourself is a great indication of self-confidence, which is what we teenagers strive for during our time in school.

**Les Grandes Personnes Aiment Les Chiffres Anonymous**

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

I grew up in a nonreligious household, but for as long as I can remember, I’ve been taught to worship my academics as the key to my success in the future. Instead of praying 5 times daily or memorizing biblical verses, nearly every day my mother and I would sit down with workbooks she bought, always with Clip-Art pictures of apples and pencils on the cover. Through countless addition problems and grammar exercise after grammar exercise, my mother – almost militantly – assured that my reading, writing, and math skills were always 2 grade levels ahead. Instead of a Bat Mitzvah or confirmation, my rites of passage were making the national spelling bee and scoring at the 93rd percentile on the SAT in 8th grade.

Why? Because just as devout Christians work for salvation, or Buddhists and Hindus struggle to attain nirvana, I have labored along the path toward a Holy Grail (an Ivy League education) and a vague fruition that my parents define as a prosperous career. As they love to say, my high school education is “laying a foundation for the rest of my life”.

I bought into this belief, reading Wikipedia article after Wikipedia article on the college admissions process. In 7th grade, I could recite all the names of the Ivy League schools. That same year, my mom borrowed a Princeton Review book profiling the Best 377 Colleges. I read every word, cover to cover, in the massive tome. By the time I started high school, I knew most of their acceptance rates, SAT score ranges, and rankings according to both Forbes and U.S. and World Report.

In an insightful French storybook entitled Le Petit Prince, the narrator remarks that “les grandes personnes aiment les chiffres”: big people love numbers. The saying holds true for Eastern parenting. To other parents, and more painfully your own, you become a list of numbers and accomplishments – SAT scores, GPAs, awards, competitions you’ve placed in.

I think few people want to be defined that way. I know I don’t. I think of myself as far more than a handful of scores and percentiles that can be haphazardly flung onto a graph. I have much more dimension, both literally and figuratively, than that single red dot on a scatterplot, indistinguishable from the others except for its location. And yet, my brain is measured by the amount of calculus it can do or the number of grammar rules it knows.

Why not by its confidence and solidarity? Why not by the originality of its

perspective? Why not by its unquenchable thirst for knowledge? Because “quickness of mind” and “depth of understanding” can’t be put on a résumé, and SAT scores and honor bands can.

My academic career, my intelligence, the quality of my intellect should not be

measured by, or confined to a double-spaced, 12-point-font list of bullet points that can fit on a single sheet of paper. Because a parent who constantly defines their child as a series of numbers risks forgetting, and thereby devaluing, the rest of that child’s still-blooming being. I can explain the main causes of the Civil War in language that my 11 year old sister can understand. I can discuss the benefits of microloans for women in 3rd world countries. I can face a panel full of critics in a debate without faltering.

I am eloquent, inquisitive, open-minded – none of which can be measured by any amount of numbers.

**Performing the Heart Michelle Kang**

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

The piano groaned in dismay as my fingers struck the wrong chords. My wrists were stiff, my shoulders hunched forward, and my gaze was expressionless—but I continued to play, unconcerned, as this broken Chopin spiraled downward into a crumbling mess.

As I landed the last dissonant chord with an ironic flair, I looked at my mom expectantly. She sat at the dining room table, listening to me practice with her fingers curled around a coffee cup, a perturbed grimace expressing exactly how she felt about my performance.

“I really hate piano,” I explained, as if it really needed to be said.

I had been telling her this for months: I was not a piano player. There was too much technicality in this lifeless instrument; not enough smoothnessin which I could express myself. It was simply impossible for my wild mind to sit in one spot for hours like this, staring at nothing but black and white, black and white, black and white all day.

“Violin!” she exclaimed suddenly. She slammed down her cup. “Michelle, don’t you want to try violin?”

I blinked at her. Violin? It did sound oddly appealing: Violin. Violin. Violin…

A week later, I stepped off the school bus into the cool November weather. My mother stood waiting for me, car keys in hand.

“Today,” she declared, “is your first violin lesson. We’re going to your new teacher’s house to meet her!”

It was all too sudden and unexpected. The car was suddenly too hot, the seats too hard; and as I sat, unnaturally still, each bump in the road launched a new fear into my head. But at the same time, there was an eagerness I’d never experienced before—foreign, in the most delightful way.

We finally pulled up to a small home painted warm brown and surrounded by thick woods. The front door greeted me with a loud, squeaky creak, and the house smelled of pine needles and was filled with color—not black and white, not black and white.

She stood inside, waiting with a smile. It thrilled me that she looked just as excited as I felt. “Hello,” she said. “I’m Barbara.”

I could hardly sit still. It was all so much to take in—the worn, colorful rug that filled the whole room, the huge window that invited the sunlight in to warm the chairs, the bookshelf filled with hundreds of music sheets and books. Would I someday know how to play all of those pieces?

“Do you have any questions, Michelle?” Barbara asked me then. “Anything you’re wondering?”

I smiled. “Could you… play for me?”

I still remember that beautiful sound, filling up the small room—warming my ears and my skin and reverberating through my body, the notes dancing and twirling around themselves in the air before fading away. My fingers itched to try.

On the car ride home, I began imagining a future Michelle, performing on a big stage for thousands of wildly applauding people. I imagined my mom and dad and sister and Barbara, watching me proudly from the front row.

I still have that image in mind every time I pick up my violin, feeling the steel strings vibrating under my fingers—but what I truly learned from violin is not the notes, but the realization of the power of my own passion. I fell in love with violin because I wanted to do it, and because it was who I was; because it was where my zeal had found a home. Every time I interrogate a witness at a Mock Trial tournament; every time I smash a tennis ball into my opponent’s court; every time I pick up a pen and write a research paper, I imagine what this utter love can do, and how far it can take me.

I imagine, take a deep breath, and perform my heart.

**Travels Anonymous**

**Tell us about yourself.**

I ask a man for directions, only to be rewarded with awkward silence and a mildly bemused, uncomprehending stare. I try other passersby and get the same discomforting stare, sometimes coupled with an apologetic, “Sorry, no English”. The one woman who does seem to understand me offers a dazzling smile and replies, “Stew to rum migi ni mawatte, zutto stun kono flailing chicken. (Stew and rum turn right, and ever stun this flailing chicken),” then turns and briskly walks away. Each conversation leaves me more confused, but the harder I try, the more frustrated I get. I walk through crowds with a sinking stomach, fists balled by my sides, thinking, “This wasn’t the way it was supposed to be.”

When my mother offered me a solo trip to Harajuku, Japan, I was thrilled. I researched tourist attractions deep into the night, amassed huge piles of maps and brochures, created the perfect packing plan, and scheduled everything down to the last minute. I was going to traipse boldly through new territories, easily navigate streets and read maps and signs with translations underneath, and confidently order meals from servers who spoke coherent English. The trip was going to be a fun, doable challenge.

My naivety astounds me.

Everything has me bewildered – there is a man flaunting zebra prints layered with tiger stripes under faux fur; a loli-goth girl in a lacy Victorian dress stands next to a man wearing nothing but a loincloth and socks; the city is a labyrinth; conversation leaves me tangled in an incomprehensible, rapid-fire blur of Japanese and English; and even the toilets stupefy me with their twenty-something buttons.

As I am forced to accept how truly lost I am, I surprise myself and smile. The mounting panic steadily subsides, and I am left with a strange mixture of mild dismay and exhilaration. I am lost, yes. But I am also in the middle of Harajuku, the fashion center of Japan – a cultural center of the world. Looking up, I see that what I had moments before perceived simply as an unknown area is now a whirlpool of diversity, pulsing with an excited, high-tension atmosphere. The clothing and styles are unfamiliar, the signs around me flash neon symbols I cannot decipher, and the garbled speech of passerby sounds like life played at two-times speed.

I spend the rest of the evening wandering through storefronts, watching blurs of sailor uniforms mix with business suits and yukatas, exploring streets filled with takoyaki vendors and rotating sushi bars and maid cafes, understanding absolutely nothing, having nothing understood, and loving every second of it.

Three summers later, I hold a map somewhere in the streets of Bangkok, Thailand. I can’t speak; I can’t understand; I can’t read. I have no plan, I am alone and lost in a distant, unfamiliar country, and I am entirely enjoying myself.

**The Orbital Force of my Autistic Brother Erin Fishman**

**Evaluate a significant figure in your life, and describe how they have shaped your ideals and values.**

I am holding my brother's hand."Hi, Will," I say."Hi," he mutters curtly, a trained reply.

It's better than the less favorable option of "Goodbye, please" or "I want goodbye."

His palm feels like a living creature itself, warm and squirming. When he looks past the line of trees, I'm watching his face for signs of recognition, peering into the reflection in his pupils. I want to know what he sees, but his gaze is smooth asphalt roads to nowhere, black tar poured inside brilliant green irises. I wonder if he is floating inside that blackness, endlessly disconnected. I squeeze his palm, and he says nothing.

It is an unseasonably warm day in autumn. On the way to the park, he stares out the window at the mess of color: red burning into orange, orange flirting with smears of yellow, deep brown branches forking into patches of sky. He laughs at absolutely nothing. I am happy to give this to moment to him, even if it does not really belong to me.

My mother parks the car outside the park, a small little plot of land encased in a chain link fence. This is a departure from Will's normal routine when we visit him, which is unreasonably nerve-racking. He is a wild card, a train drifting and trembling on the edge of the tracks; it is impossible to say how this trip will affect him. I risk a glance to the backseat, and he stares back at me, for once ungrudging.

Blissfully, the park is nearly empty. A handful of kids play basketball on a court several hundred yards away. They watch us for a moment, perhaps pondering the strange sight of a fourteen year old playing in a park. My brother runs across the grass, flapping his arms. I wonder if he feels the wind caught between his fingertips; I wonder if he can taste his euphoria in his throat.

I watch him from the swings, my feet grazing the wood chips as I sway back and forth. He stands at the edge of the fence, tossing sticks over the top. I watch as he methodically picks up each twig, inspecting it as if one is more worthy of being thrown than any other. I glance at my mother, wondering if I should intervene. "He's okay," she assures me, but our eyes don't leave him.

About an hour later, we're about to leave when he stops in his tracks. His eyes catch the light tumbling through the branches of an old oak tree."What is it?" I ask."Help," he replies.

I shake my head.

"Help."

I'm about to object, but it doesn't matter because he is already reaching, pulling himself onto the lowest branch. He leaves me no choice but to place my hands under his legs and support him as he scrambles up, grasping at fistfuls of leaves. This proves to be significantly more difficult than when he was six years old.

"Come on, Will," I groan, and when he laughs, it's almost in spite of me, in spite of this entire scenario.

Will shifts so that his back is against the trunk, and his gangly legs curl around a thick branch. He turns his face into the sun, singing a tuneless song."What do you say?" I prompt, poking his belly. He swats my hand away, but replies: "Thank you."

I roll my eyes. "You're welcome."

When we drive back to his residential home, I watch him with his eyes on the world.

And there I am, and there I will always be, caught in Willie's impossible orbit. I realize, then, that my brother is not a puzzle, nor does he miss any pieces of himself.

He is the sum of his parts. He is a mystery, a story with a million endings. And he is complete.

**Artistic Abilities William Nelson Marcussen**

**The lessons we take from failure can be fundamental to later success. Recount an incident or time when you experienced failure. How did it affect you, and what did you learn from the experience?**

I was jealous. Sally could draw a perfect circle and I couldn’t. She always created beautifully proportionate people while I sketched a blobby figure with one arm. I tried over and over, listened to instructions, but as hard as I tried I could never draw as well as Sally could. I thought that I just wasn't creative, so I told myself I was better at other things and carried on eating my peanut butter and jelly sandwich.

That was fifth grade. Then, when I entered my sophomore year, I picked up a digital camera and my obsession began. On the Internet, I had seen magnificent pictures of nature, cars, and even mundane things such as pens and paper. The world changed for me as everything suddenly became beautiful in its own way. I was so fixated on creating a stunning picture that I would never stop until I got just the right shot. I wanted to capture the images that were inside my head, with every detail in place; the rust on the side of the railing, the small cracks in the cement, the sun reflecting off the yellow line down the middle of the road, and the golden light that every photographer chases. It was always a challenge, something that would never stop at a single shot. It would take tens, hundreds, and sometimes more to get the picture that was worth the much-prized thousand words.

It was a Sunday morning and I had 30 pictures due the next day. I thought, “I’ll just get the pictures out of the way; it won’t take long.” Little did I know: instead I found myself completely lost in my work. I grabbed a bowl of water, a water dropper, and my camera and attempted to recreate a water drop floating in the air, as if all gravity had vanished. Between the focus of the camera, the perfect amount of water, pressing the shutter at the precise moment with the exact lighting, there were so many variables; all it took to compromise a shot was for one to go wrong. Literally 100 pictures went by in a blur and all but a few of them were out of focus. I shot 100 more, then another hundred. It was no longer about the assignment, but about proving to myself that I actually was creative. I tried changing the type of water dropper I was using and tried switching the modes in the camera countless times. Soon, I had almost three thousand pictures, a completely full memory card. I had a vision of what I wanted the entire time: a large splash of water creating a crater in the glassy and otherwise untouched water surface, launching out three perfectly-aligned drops. I ended up getting just that. Then I checked my watch. I had become so lost in my quest for the near-perfect picture that four hours of nonstop work felt like minutes.

Looking back at grade school, I realize that I wasn't the best at drawing -- yet I had a whole other type of creativity that had never been explored. I now understand that natural gifts are just the root of a talent, and that true talent only blooms with persistence and determination. I am now aware that my fifth grade classmate wasn’t just born with talent, but actually practiced drawing that circle on every worksheet she was given, until it was near-perfect. I no longer see things as black and white, but in a million tones, in all colors. This new perspective transformed a trash can in the middle of a cityscape into an interesting story: an object I had always walked past and ignored is now part of one of my best photographs. After my early artistic disappointment, I discovered an unknown world through the viewfinder of my camera and a creative side that in truth I had always possessed. I just needed to pursue it.

**Pitching a Venture Anonymous**

**In a short paragraph, please briefly elaborate on one of your extracurricular activities or work experiences. (250 words)**

He had a complete poker face when I asked for $250,000. This man was on the panel of investors to whom I presented my entrepreneurial venture as part of a scenario analysis project during *The Fullbridge Program*, a rigorous business boot camp for college students wishing to solidify their business skills. This was not just another summer class where I would sit in a room for an entire day, staring at a whiteboard; I actually had the chance to take an active role in business as part of my learning.

After absorbing various concepts in accounting, finance, business valuation/analysis, and cash flows, we applied our knowledge by examining Harvard Business School case studies, many of which shed light on the seemingly dull beginnings and rises of many successful companies today. Then, at the end of the course, my team of three created and developed a business model for a new entrepreneurial venture in the clean-tech industry. Our team went into Shanghai’s central business district, conducted market research and interviews, and assessed consumer preferences on clean-tech. At the end of this simulation, we successfully developed a minimum viable product, along with revenue projections and risk analyses. Then, we pitched everything to a board of venture capitalists. After seeing a business idea grow from inception to completion, I could truly understand the skills I had gained: skills relevant to the real world.

**Looking Down 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?**

Above the clouds, on the peak of the mountain, I stand, overlooking the vast silhouette of slopes and trees, contemplating the infinite possibilities of routes to take.

I watch other skiers play “follow the leader” down the groomed trails, repeating someone else’s path over and over again. The rusty “Off-Piste Area” sign on the side beckons me past the frozen orange rope. This is my destination. Seeing not a single skier and no fresh tracks to lead the way, I thrust myself off the ledge, down the welcoming abyss. In front of me, trees appear out of the mist. I turn and swerve briskly to avoid collision. Out here, nothing is set. There are no boundaries. I need to make all the right calls. I am knee deep in fresh powder, plowing down the mountain. My heart is bursting out of my chest. I push down hard to one side, turn, and stop. Such split-second decisions in the backcountry are the difference between an amazing run and a frantic tumble to the bottom.

Pausing to catch my breath halfway down the mountain, I look back up, seeing the path that I carved through the trees, the path that I created. Looking down, I contemplate what new path I will soon create. Spotting a patch of undisturbed powder, I take off in that direction. My skis are the first to touch the snow, the first to carve the path. I can turn left or slide right, go between trees or over logs. The pure snow and equally pure freedom lead to new challenges, new drops, and new exhilaration. I look down the slope, and decide how to make the best of it. I could glide between vegetation or dig through deep powder and drops. These different elements of the slope define the skier.

Speeding down the mountain, I whirl fine powdered snow up and around myself, into my face as I ski through. Our army of skiers, boring through the snow, seems unstoppable, wielding fervor and amazement. Leading the pack, I’m not exactly sure of where we are, but I’m certain of what we’re doing and where we’re going. Pushing on, we brave through the blinding blizzard, dodge the trees, and swiftly leap across the drops, nearing the frontier.

Traversing the edge of the mountain, I see things from different perspectives, and I feel different. I could have followed the groomed snow made by another man, but instead, I created the path that led me here, I made all the turns that brought me here, I led myself here. With the small town at the bottom coming into misty but sweeping view, we’ve succeeded. I triumph, sitting near the edge, sipping on a lukewarm but soon to be ice-cold canned coffee, and appreciating this moment. This moment challenges me to exude confidence and enterprise in all areas of my life, to strike out into the mist and defy boundaries. I can envision the finish line and my end goal, but the process is not clearly defined. Diving into the haze is the only way to discover such opportunities, such sparks of creativity that would render a ski run, or any pursuit, amazing.

**My Hero, Nancy Drew Melanie Kos**

**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.**

When I think of heroes in my life, there are so many options to consider: who I am most like, who I have tried to emulate, who I aspire to be. Many could and would answer their parents, an older family member, or even a standout teacher. I certainly could say this too, but I know the truth.

Nancy Drew, you’re my hero.

Nancy Drew is the original female protagonist; her book series started in the 1930s and continues to this day. Nancy is a badass, point blank. With a lawyer father, a spanking blue convertible, and a college boyfriend, she sure does seem like your typical rich girl. But what sets her apart is her knack for solving crimes and mysteries, the way in which she conducts herself, redefining what it means to be a girl.

My good old Polish parents would often push girly things on me: the pink plastic heels, the frilly skirts, the bobbled hair ties splitting my head of hair into two painfully symmetrical pigtails, ingraining a permanent middle part into my mane. My seven year old self would get sweaty running around or rollerblading, and my mother would sigh to me in Polish, *zobacz co zrobiłas*, “look what you did.” In the first grade, when I picked up that Nancy Drew Notebooks paperback,*Flower Power*, I saw a mix of two worlds I never thought could come together.

I devoured that book, and asked my elderly librarian for more Nancy Drew. She smiled at me, a child who actually wanted a book that wasn’t chock full of pictures. She led me to a back room that smelled of aging texts. She handed me a book, yellowed from age with a plain blue cover, drastically different from the cartoon cover of *Flower Power*. “I loved those books when I was a girl,” she smiled wistfully, and left me to it. I was confused. It was so thick, some two hundred-odd pages for someone who could barely sit through *Sleeping Beauty*. The original Nancy Drew series was far more complex and, frankly, rather archaic in comparison to the watered down spinoff that was *Flower Power*. The pressure was on. I knew that this librarian, also a family friend, would think less of me, this first grader, if I didn’t take the damn book she loved so much. So I checked out *The Hidden Staircase*, the second book in the seemingly abstruse original Nancy Drew series, and my seven year old brain was rocked.

I sought to become a sleuth just like Nancy, searching for hidden staircases, mysterious mannequins, and old treasures in my attic, living vicariously through Nancy even as all of these endeavors proved unsuccessful for me. As I’ve gotten older, the storylines may have become muddied, but her drive, her fierce independence, and her unrelenting personality have held fast onto me, the daughter of Polish immigrants, who, despite all struggles, have always been told that perseverance is key to success. Nancy’s sleuthing stories only ingrained this trait deeper into my being, instilling a love of reading into me as well.

I am still a sleuth. Curiosity and conscientiousness are perennial in my personality. Whether talking with friends or being editor-in-chief of my school newspaper, The Herald, I always seek the full picture of any problem that plagues me. I may not be interrogating suspects or finding clues as Nancy did, but I am interviewing witnesses and seeking sources. Nancy Drew helped create the person I am today and still will be down whatever paths I may take. You don’t need to be the girl detective herself to figure that one out.

**Eclectic Appetite Anonymous**

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

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

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

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

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

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**Mothering Daughter Anonymous**

**Describe the world you come from.**

“So you want to go to med school. Is it for the money or to appease your parents?” Neither, because money isn’t worth the sacrifice of dealing with insanity and I have only one parent, who cannot be appeased by my attending med school. This was the answer I couldn’t vocalize to my counselor when I went to request a letter of recommendation. I didn’t want to be registered as the precocious child with a cynical outlook or the pitiful, unofficial head-of-the-household who has to cope with a manic-depressive mother. So I smile wryly, then slide her the ribbon-wrapped KitKat bar and a thank-you letter before heading out.

Of course, my counselor meant no harm with the joke, but I could never return those jokes with a frivolous comment, because I cannot think of one good enough to diminish the weight of my reality. Just like my response, my reason for pursuing a profession in the medical field, specifically in psychiatrics, is heavy and dry: I need to see my mother as a patient and a human being in need of my help, not as someone who should have been my caretaker. It was the day of my mom’s psychotherapy session, so I left school early to give her a ride. On our way back home, she gently took my right hand with both of hers and asked if I wanted to eat anything. She wanted to cook for me. We got home after dropping by the grocery market, and I sat on the dining table.

While watching her cook, I remembered going over to a friend’s house in seventh grade and watching my friend and her mom make Keish. It smelled delicious and looked exotic, but my eyes were fixed on their jubilant faces. When I returned home on that seventh-grade day, I asked my mom if we could cook quesadillas together for dinner. She got up from bed, walked past me, went in and out of the restroom with a bottle of pills, and slipped back into her blanket. “Turn off the light when you leave.” I turned off the light and stood by the door for a few more seconds before going out. I took out Hot Pockets and the Costco salad that my aunt had stocked in the fridge and sat down on the six-seat dining table, but I couldn’t eat. I threw them in the trashcan and rushed back to my mom’s room. I stood before her closed bedroom door and tried to figure out a way to express what I felt, but in the end I just decided to head back to my own room.

That was the first time I felt bitter towards my mom. Now I understand that the bitterness was towards my mom’s illness. I learned not to make those kinds of requests anymore, but that day, after I left my counselor, my mom voluntarily wanted to do something for me. I watched her fumble through the groceries and stagger back and forth from the fridge to the cutting board. She could not finish cutting one full carrot before jumping to the next step. Executive and procedural dysfunction in bipolar disorder--the first thing I register in my head and then the second thought comes out as tears. As I watch my mother trying to play the role of the caretaker, but the other part of her getting in the way, I loathe myself for the times I held her to my expectations of a parent, the times I called myself unlucky and imagined living with my friends' parents, and the times I pretended to be asleep while she groaned and sobbed. At first, I couldn’t view her as something other than a mother, and once I began to see that she is unable to fulfill the duties of motherhood, she became a hollow, incomprehensible creature that only drains and hinders me.

I say to myself that my unfulfilled desire for a caretaker figure is behind me, but when I hear jokes like the one that my counselor tosses out, I still see the seventh grade kid standing before her mother’s door in me. I cannot say that I am free of the deficiencies I experienced in my childhood, but I understand how to build other layers of character to amend the flaws. I can relieve my mother of her agony, the cold stares and the suppressed disdain. Endeavoring to become a medical professional would be the only way of getting closer to understanding her as she is with the illness and taking care of her without feeling any entitlement to compensation.

**One More Fight Anonymous**

**The lessons we take from failure can be fundamental to later success. Recount an incident or time when you experienced failure. How did it affect you, and what did you learn from the experience?**

I'm standing in the arena, facing my opponent. Hands on guard and ready to fight, fists clenched and sweat dripping down my fingers. In the distance, I hear the command, "fight!" The match has begun.

Sparring, kata, sweeps, hooks, and grabs had all proven to be integral aspects of my training in the art of kenpo over the past eight years. I spent countless hours learning and mastering the material, and I was always excited to show that all of my hard work was paying off. I got that one chance at tournaments: I had to make the most of it. These days were filled with sweaty palms, nervous laughter, and bated breath.

As the minutes of the fight drag on, my breath becomes shallow and my face heats up. I continue to push on, drawing nearer to my opponent and throwing out kicks, punches, blocks. My opponent retaliates, launching a snappy roundhouse kick that jolts me off my feet and onto the ground. I'm sprawled across the floor and gasping for breath as I try to blink back the fuzziness creeping into my vision. My heart pounds violently against my chest, begging for escape. I try to inhale, but all I feel are daggers in my lungs.

Following a week of recovery, I walked back into my karate studio with a slightly bruised ego and noticeably bruised ribs. I had tried my best to push the tournament out of my mind, but there was something about it that had changed me for the worse. I was afraid to get into another fight; I was afraid to be left on the ground again, gasping for air.

The next big tournament was six months away. I was not nearly prepared for it. I shied away from every punch and kick that came my way, and I found myself in a corner more often than I was in the fight. I desperately wanted to make a redeeming appearance, so I went back to the basics. I assured myself that I knew the fundamentals of the fight, training at half-speed and painstakingly reviewing my maneuvers. I committed to long hours, practicing the roundhouse kicks, perfecting my combination strikes, mastering the art of deadly elegance. Before I knew it, I was back to full-force fights, and I was back to being confident in my abilities.

Back in the arena and back to the boiling anticipation. Back to the tournament. I lift my eyes and hear the word "fight!" ring out loud and clear. My opponent and I close the gap between us. I can feel the air whistle past my ear as her punch just narrowly misses my face, and I can feel my heart picking up its pace. This is the moment of truth: fight back and overcome, or retreat to safety? I take a deep breath, put up my hands, and launch everything I have into this fight. Sweat and ragged breaths, exhaustion and pain, punches, kicks, and grabs. Everything combined into one whirlwind until finally: victory. My opponent was defeated and my insecurities slain. I never want to back away from a challenge again: I want to stare adversity in the eye and tell it "watch me." Every challenge that I face is an opportunity for me to find new strength, to discover parts of me that I didn't know even existed. I know that bigger challenges will come my way. Perhaps a fight with a roommate, a disagreement with a professor, or the pressure to participate in activities that don't match up with my beliefs. None of these obstacles are going to be easy to face, but I've learned how to push through the hard times and not stop until I reach the other side. So for now, I'm going to keep my hands on guard and my head in the fight.

**The Child Who Opened My Eyes Alena Rajwani**

**Boston College: What contemporary issue or trend relating to politics, culture, and society, or foreign policy particularly concerns you and why? Yale: Please reflect on something you would like us to know about you that we might not learn from the rest of your application, or on something about which you would like to say more. You may write about anything—from personal experiences or goals to interests or intellectual pursuits.**

Disgusted by the foul urban odors of Pakistan, my younger brother and I became possessed by the utility of our iPhones and remained confined within the walls of our uncle’s apartment. Eventually, my uncle became frustrated with our self-isolation and offered to take us on an “adventure.” In the minds of children, an adventure consists of going to a park or a skating arena. But we were in for a not-so-pleasant surprise.

After a bumpy rickshaw ride through narrow streets and arid fields, we arrived at a plantation. Wandering through the rows of crops, I saw children using sharp tools in the scorching sun. We took a seat on a haystack and were joined by a young boy, whom I had seen working in the fields earlier. He told us about the long hours. He told us about the life-threatening injuries he suffered. He told us about the school he attended and the quality time his family used to spend together before a multinational company built a factory in town. Soon, the azan began to play, signaling the time for prayer. My brother and I headed home, both touched and troubled by the boy’s stories.

The image of the boy stuck with me even after I returned to Dallas. To ease my queasy conscience, I began researching child labor, hoping this abuse was not widespread. To my disappointment, it was. The more I learned about the topic, the more frustrated I became. After surfing through what seemed to be a million links, I finally found one that relieved me. The article explained how region-wide boycotts encourage companies to implement better work environments. In that moment, I realized the power humans possess to encourage changes in longstanding practices.

There are two types of change — positive and negative — and unfortunately, many companies pick the latter. However, as a tutor who makes money by helping students excel, I do not view business as a win-lose situation for myself and my students. Rather, I believe that business should and can be a win-win for both the company and the surrounding societies. Through impact investment, in which companies stimulate societal uplift alongside profits, businesses can help their own communities. By concentrating in business analytics and economics, I will ensure that business models serve disadvantaged rural societies. We must create a world where profit is not the only measure of prosperity.

**On Being the Higher Percent Elyse Mackenzie**

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

When I was fifteen, I considered a theory: it is possible to assign a numerical value to two people in order to measure how much they care about one another. In total, the two numbers would add up to a percentage of one hundred. The more effort, love, and curiosity one person put into the relationship, the higher their percentage would be. For example, the ratio of care between myself and, say, Justin Timberlake, would be written as ninety-nine to one; I care 99% about him while he cares 1% about me (the 1% being generous considering he doesn’t know I exist).

I truly thought this theory was groundbreaking. It explained so much! My middle school crush and I understandably never worked out; our care ratio was at a heartbreaking 70:30 (me, crush).

Over dinner, I proudly explained the basics of the theory to my family. My family has always encouraged my life contemplations, so I was surprised when they responded to my newest statement with equivocality. Between both of my parents, my mother was the more skeptical. She listed some names in order to hear me use the care meter in action, asking me to “rank” myself versus my friends, my coaches, and my family members.

I found a problem: I began to answer many of these relationships with 50:50. My mom sat silently and listened to my struggle considering percentage choices. Eventually, she told me she had different numbers in mind. “Are you sure 50:50 is true?” she asked me. “I see you more as an 80:20 kind of person!”

80:20? I was briefly at a loss for words as I considered her statement. Could it be true? Could people care such a significant amount less about me than I do for them?

Sensing my discomfort, she attempted to redeem herself. “I didn’t mean it that way!” she explained. “50% effort just doesn’t seem large enough to describe the care you have for your friends.” I stayed up late that night ranking my relationships in my mind. I found that even my mom’s proposed 80% was not large enough to describe my love for the people I know and activities I do.

In fact, I cared a full 100% about my friends, athletics, musical development, and my aspirations for the future. I recognized the theory as flawed as I contemplated it in bed that night. After all, who am I to say that two people cannot love and care about one another 100:100? Can't we all invest ourselves into someone or something and get the same exact passion in return?

Numbers can define countless things, but life and relationships are worth more than two (sometimes discouraging) values that add up to one hundred. Hearing that I am the type of person to have 80:20 relationships has remained poignant in my mind since this event occurred nearly three years ago.

I have learned more about myself since then, and most of all, I have realized that there are worse traits to have than caring more than your share about people or things. I matured that day, as I learned that life is not about minimizing your care to match the care of others towards you. I will always approach everything I do with passion and purpose; I have been ravenous for knowledge and new life experiences since I uttered my first word “book.” I am confident that wherever I end up, whatever I am doing, and whatever I am getting back in return, I will be proud of my 100%.

**Patience is the Sharpest Weapon 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.**

The movements are lucid in my mind: *Lunge - contre de sixte - paré en cédant - feinte de riposte.* Right on the arm to finally lunge and touch the foot. Green light. I got her. 13-13; only two more touches to win. I can hear her breathing through the dark metallic grid that shields her sweaty face … or is it my own?

“Prêtes? Allez.” I advance over to her end of the piste. She’s aggressive: I can provoke her gently by faking a – red light. No! I get back en garde. Focus. I can still win. She’s tired. I catch a brief glimpse of her eyes before she dons her mask after fixing her dishevelled ponytail. She’s lost her concentration. Two minutes left: plenty. I take my time, nimbly skirting back and forth along the piste. She submits right into my steady rhythm. Confidence often leads to heedlessness. Inattention can be fatal. Back, back, one more, … green! My flèche hits her directly on the shoulder. Her furious roar is deafening. Back to the two-metre line. Just one more, this time no dawdling. “Allez.” Her adrenaline is clearly flowing. She tries to engage, but abandons the idea and starts to rapidly gain territory. Overly aggressive. I push back. 15 seconds left. Her coach screams something in Italian and she falls back towards the warning line. My coach stays silent. Five seconds. Four. Three. She lunges. *Beeeep*. Done

Sometimes it is better to attack, to be faster and mightier than the blade. In fencing, I’ve found that patience and precision are much sharper weapons: David versus Goliath. To be honest, it’s quite intuitive; would you really run towards a loaded gun with no incentive? I like to wait. Goliaths get tired and anxious; under pressure, a countdown usually does them in. Impatience leads to imprudence. Hold off that extra second and that window of opportunity flashes just in time for you to lunge to victory. As it reads in la Fontaine’s fable, “Patience et longueur de temps font plus que force ni que rage”; meticulous persistence trumps brute force.

The deepest understanding of myself is the understanding that I have acquired through my many bouts. While some adversaries squeal in victory or defeat, I walk over to hear my coach’s advice, then quietly get back en garde, thinking only of my next attack. What happened in the last touch? Utterly unimportant; all that matters is the point I am about to make. She won the last bout? I will win this touch. I beat the last opponent? I will do it again.

In truth, my development of this mindset has been a far greater challenge than improving my fencing. While friends are worrying about football scores, I am fretting over my non-extant post-college housing. My worst nightmares have been about my broken car, which I am a long way from owning, or forgetting my guitar for the talent show – a month before the event. My biggest obstacle is “seizing the day,” “living in the moment,” “YOLO”-ing. Despite this inherent anxiety, I’ve trained myself to adopt what my coach calls “the Hungarian method”; one touch will win the bout. I ignore the past and future points; all that matters is what I am doing now to win. I’ll focus on the next bout later. I’ll think of lunch when I get hungry. I’ll consider what’s next when next comes. When needed, I can clear my thundering brain and converge my thoughts onto my current situation.

Buzzers sound all around me, followed by triumphant shouts or defeated groans. Looking around, I see a gym full of desultory ghosts. Some run in circles to purge themselves of thoughts, headphones jammed into their ears, keeping them away from dreaded conversation. Others sit, contemplating blank walls, retrospective images of their previous games echoing through their minds. I take off my meshed mask, shake her hand, unclip myself from the piste and walk away.

**Familiarity 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.**

“Entonces, Max, ¿dime porque has venido a España?”

I stared blankly at my host Dad while trying to catch a glimpse of how large his moustache really was, as he glanced over his shoulder towards me, his car narrowly avoided the oncoming traffic. His words were ringing in my head.

"So tell me, Max, why have you come to Spain?"

These were amongst the first words I heard upon my arrival. I nodded and smiled, yet understood nothing but my name. I stumbled upon School Year Abroad (SYA) Spain while exploring alternatives to my daily routine. To some, and understandably so, London is remarkable. To me, London had become the norm. For over 2,000 days I had walked through the same school entrance, passed the same painted letters declaring The American School in London as I bounded up the stairwell, and listened to the all too familiar sound of the morning announcements at the start of each day. My life had become repetitive, and I needed a change from what seemed to be an unending cycle.

As soon as I stepped foot in Zaragoza, I was immersed in a completely different culture: residing with a family that didn’t speak a lick of English and taking a standard American curriculum in Spanish. In retrospect, I wasn’t entirely prepared for such drastic change.

As my host Dad and I attempted to forge some sort of communication during that car ride, a feeling of pure dread overwhelmed me as we neared my new street. I felt like a stranger to everything around me. I was alone, knew no one, and had a house but not a home. As I followed the man with the moustache into the Almingol household, the then unfamiliar smell of paella wafted through the air.

Food became a medium that my family and I could enjoy together. Meals began in speechless unison, and eventually became the foundation of our most memorable moments: my younger brother Markos and I managed to quarrel early on about whether Chelsea or Barcelona was the better club as we heartily dug into our meal. Months later, my father brought a newspaper to dinner, and to our delight opened it to a photo of him taking part in a political protest, his moustache enormous as ever. The passage of food went both ways: I would cook up my signature scrambled eggs on Sunday mornings, before my family prepared a feast of meats and vegetables. We scarfed it down, leaving our fingernails laden with grease.

During these meals, the TV was always on. The Spanish news presenters provided a soundtrack to each moment in our abode whether in the living room, kitchen, or laundry room, and I literally felt I couldn’t escape the flickering screens and unintelligible chatter. But the seemingly meaningless tradition of relaxing as a family in front of the television became a powerful connection. After dinner, we’d sit in companionable silence, as our dog Nemo attempted to clamber onto the couch, and let the voices wash over us, hearing the words yet giving them little thought. Surrounded by the unfamiliar, everyone connects through their similarities, and TV was our channel of communication.

Nine months later, my final banquet, a concoction of cooked yellow rice and stewed rabbit, staked its claim as a paella of the highest grade. We demolished it. I was no longer tentative or reserved; I was one of the Almingol family. With the TV on, my words flowed over our food, yet it was not my fluency that brought us together as a family. It was the cadence of the newscaster and the warm scent of paella.

“So, Max, why have you come to Spain?”

I went to Spain seeking change. I was consumed by another culture, and yes, I have a more global perspective, yet what I truly gained from the experience had less to do with the language I spoke, and the country I was in, but with the family who had embraced me.

**Wizards and Trumpets Anonymous**

**In his novel, Let the Great World Spin, Colum McCann writes: “We seldom know what we're hearing when we hear something for the first time, but one thing is certain: we hear it as we will never hear it again. We return to the moment to experience it, I suppose, but we can never really find it, only its memory, the faintest imprint of what it really was, what it meant.” Tell us about something you heard or experienced for the first time and how the years since have affected your perception of that moment.**

As in Harry Potter, where the wand chooses the wizard, the trumpet chose me—although, at the time, I thought I was choosing the trumpet. Four wind musicians stood before me in my elementary school’s auditorium. Each one played an excerpt showcasing the instrument’s ability, trying to entice us all to play that instrument. I was able to resist the lures of three, but the fourth instrument, the trumpet, captured my eye and resonated with my soul. Little did I know, that sound would come to mean so much more. I didn’t know that choosing this instrument meant that I would find a group of people so similar to me, so in tune with my every quirk. Even if fellow trumpeters don’t understand my Katherine-isms, they certainly—and wholeheartedly—accept them. With an instrument that pierces every melody, one cannot hide mistakes: trumpets are unabashedly themselves. I didn’t know I would be sitting in the back of the ensemble: when you’re far enough away from the conductor, you can just express yourself more. The poor flutes are tightly bound to the conductor’s confines, while trumpets can add their own flourishes—their musical identities—to the piece. All trumpet sections I’ve been in has had the utmost pride in their work; our exaggerated (and oftentimes disruptively loud) displays of musicianship foster a warmth that I can’t imagine hearing in any other section. I didn’t know that I would assume the role of lead trumpet in jazz, specifically. As a fifth grader, I had little to no idea of the context a trumpet plays in. Only now do I appreciate the versatility in style that this brass beauty lends itself to. The trumpet is as well-rounded as an instrument gets, integral to many different genres. I play in wind ensemble, symphony orchestra, jazz ensemble, pit orchestra, marching band, brass quintets, solos, and more—but not without major adjustments to my playing technique. I have the privilege to lead an amalgam of sections, filled with distinctive individuals; it is only through this variety that I was able to identify a singular leadership style—what works and what doesn’t—across all groups. I wouldn’t give up any of my ensembles today; thank goodness I didn’t choose the clarinet. My fifth-grade self may have shallowly chosen the trumpet for its shiny exterior and deafening tone, but her intuition was right: this instrument fits me.

**A Slow Start Anonymous**

**Write about a time you failed at something**

She runs so gracefully, her arms swinging back and forth, her legs flying, barely even touching the ground as she laps the girl in front of her. I am that girl—not the graceful one but the slow one who runs like a beanbag chair, hunched over and shuffling across the gravel, getting passed by the athletic ones. That pretty much sums up my freshman year of cross-country—a time when I could not even make it from the entrance of the school to the end of the parking lot.

During the summer going into high school, I thought I would branch out and join the cross-country team, craving that team-togetherness of high school sports without the required coordination of other activities like soccer or field hockey. My thinking was that cross-country would be relatively simple—run fast and don't fall. No balls, or nets, or sticks to confuse me or reveal my incompetency. The first day, I laced up my worn out P.E. sneakers and tied my hair tightly with not one but two hair ties. As the team took off, their feet rhythmically tapping the pavement, I followed suit, eager to prove myself to these strangers—an intimidating collection of high school girls whose maturity radiated from their brace-less faces. For the first seven and a half seconds, my heart and feet raced in unison and I was a part of the pack.

I soon realized the inverse relationship that existed between my heart and feet: for some reason as my heart quickened, my feet slowed. I was the little engine that couldn’t. I managed to make it all the way to the entrance of the parking lot, at which point I stopped and keeled over to catch my breath. That day, I finished half of the run and made it back to the high school around a half hour after the rest of my teammates, who by then were done stretching and sat waiting to be dismissed. When I shuffled into view, they starting whooping and clapping and cheering me on until I reached the sidewalk that marked the end of the run. I laughed, embarrassed by the attention. I debated quitting cross-country with pretty much every step along the run but for a fleeting moment as I made my way to the team, I forgot all about the pain.

This fall will be my last season of cross-country. And while I may not be able to lead the pack on our runs or help the team win a meet, I can always make them laugh. All I have to do is bring up my first day of practice and remind them of the girl who couldn’t make it out of the parking lot. I would be lying if I said that I never thought about quitting after that first day when the girls cheered me to the finish line. The possibility crosses my mind all the time. Cross-country challenges me every day to run faster, run longer, run harder. Sometimes I ask myself what I have accomplished from these past three years of mediocre running. But the truth is, I love it. I love my teammates and I love the thrill and I love pushing myself, not only in running but in all that I do. I will never be the best at cross-country and I accept that wholeheartedly. The funny thing is that despite this knowledge, I will never stop trying. When the gun goes off during each cross-country race, my heart still pounds and my chest still tightens. I step up to the line hoping, praying, believing that I might win. And when I don't, I am not defeated. I think back to that girl who could not run past the parking lot, I lace up my sneakers, tie back my hair with not one but two hair ties, and I laugh.

# Being a Triplet 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.

“So, like, if I pinch you, will the other two feel it?”

“Are you all identical, even the boy?”

”How many minutes are you oldest by?”

Being a triplet comes with daily quirky questions. I do not remember the exact moment when I realized my background was special; growing up, having both a brother and sister my own age certainly did not feel unusual. But as we mature, it is increasingly apparent that my situation is a blessing.

Lauren has taught me the importance of embracing uniqueness. She and I are nearly opposite: On the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, I am an ENTJ (extraversion, intuition, thinking, judging) and she is an INFJ (introversion, intuition, feeling, judging). For a long time, these contrasts were challenging rather than complementary to our relationship. We made everything a contest—who could be smartest, prettiest, Mom’s favorite and all else under the sun. Of course sibling rivalry is natural, but being the same age heightened the blatancy of our differences. We constantly judged each other for our differences and tried so hard to be what we could not be. I could not fully love my sister until we matured and used our contrasting qualities to our advantage. Our relationship has taught me that some things are just not worth the competition; we have different gifts, and it was miserable constantly comparing ourselves. My sister has pushed me to reflect on my strengths and weaknesses. More importantly, this self-awareness has taught me how to utilize my talents to support others and to myself accept help.

Alex has taught me that slow and steady can still win the race that I usually sprint. By the time I was going out with friends every weekend and even traveling on my own, he was a still an awkward Abuela’s boy that played video games all the time. What I did not see was that he was developing into an adult, just at a slower pace than I was. He was a late bloomer, and only as an upperclassman did his patience manifest in fantastic friends, a sincere passion for history and a body like Adonis. His willingness to wait yielded detailed, quality results which has taught me to stop rushing to the next milestone and enjoy life as it comes. Often, I get so wrapped up in trying to be as productive as possible that I don’t give myself room to breathe; my brother has proved to me that patience is a respectable virtue. I used to be obsessed with rampant progress, but he has inspired me to let good things take their time and not judge others in their life journey.

My siblings have taught me how to be a leader amongst equals. I have realized that leadership is not about telling people how or what to do, but rather it is guiding others in doing their best work. Additionally, being a leader is not the job of one person; on a team, everyone is a leader in his and her own right. Just as I have led my brother and sister how to be better, they have inspired me to reach my potential, and we have learned different lessons together as a cohesive unit of three moving parts.

I’ll never get sick of the strange questions because it means I have the gift of a very special life. My siblings have taught me compassion, responsibility, forgiveness, patience, self-awareness, and other gifts that I’m likely not even aware of. When our mom would chide us with “be nice to each other, you’re all each other have,” we would groan and roll our eyes—but now I see that I would not be one-third of the girl I am if I weren’t a triplet. In this next chapter of my life, the pillars of fraternity and solidarity that Alex and Lauren have built in me will serve as a life guide.

# My Class: Religion Diversity Anonymous

## Boston College strives to provide an undergraduate learning experience emphasizing the liberal arts, quality teaching, personal formation, and engagement of critical issues. If you had the opportunity to create your own college course, what enduring question or contemporary problem would you address and why? 400 or less

“God is too big to fit in one religion.” It it is a beautiful paradox of how much hate and love can come from having a faith; it can cause war but also save lives. Religion is a vehicle for so many causes; it is not something to be scared of, but rather something that people need to be more understanding about. The world is suffering from religious intolerance; world leaders are calling for bans on certain faith groups, ISIS is killing infidels, anti-semitism is still high on the list of most prominent hate crimes in America and more. The only way to alleviate the pain that comes with ignorance is education, which is why I would teach others about the cultural and philosophical beliefs of various religions. The class would be about more than just tolerating others; it would go beyond into accepting other faiths to create a culture of respect. After all, no person can prove that one religion is fundamentally “right.”

I have already have taken steps to educate people about religious diversity. I am a contributor to School of Doodle, which is an organization that believes, that teenage girls need a forum in which to express themselves creatively. As ardent supporters of their mission, my friend Hannah and I organized an entire workshop for them. It was my idea to have a religious diversity panel, therefore it was my responsibility to organize a group of girls from various faith communities to discuss aspects of their religion, from how women are treated to how the media portrays their community. Of all my work for the September event, I was most proud of organizing this panel. Religion, when approached properly, fuels love and peace; in a time as volatile as now, it is imperative that everyone understands the foundations underlying every religion.

# Mad About Medicine Anonymous

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

His skin detached from its threadlike bindings to unveil a unique color palette. Excess blood flooded the area, only to be extracted by a contraption of assorted tubes. Muscle tissue, each fiber visible, danced around bones and ligaments to the heart’s metronome. The patient is sprawled across an adjustable bed draped in azure sheets, indistinguishable in color from the metal-wielding committee proceeding around him. An assortment of screens monitor his vital and sedative levels, constantly fluctuating throughout the operation. Millimeters of metal penetrate, slice, and contort the torn ligament, as titanium screws fuse with bone to function as pillars to the delicate structure. Nylon and polypropylene web fasten the intentional laceration. The tear in the dorsal region of his left scapholunate ligament is repaired. Fascinated and curious, I marvel at the genius orchestrating before me.

Days traversing rickety playgrounds inevitably led to my fair share of injuries, both witnessed and experienced. Cowering at the pain of a splinter’s incision and wincing at molten pavement scraping the skin off my kneecaps gave me the opportunity to observe the magical healing properties of the human body. I then assumed the role of doctor and patient, as tweezers bounced within my quivering grip and cascades of hydrogen peroxide met cotton balls. My fascination with the medical field developed early; however, my first experience came far later.

My first opportunity to experience hands-on medicine occurred in the spring of my junior year, when I was accepted to volunteer at Lahey Hospital and Medical Center. My job involved moving supplies, filing, and cleaning, but I did not care. I was enthralled by the opportunity and my fit in the hospital was hand-in-glove. Each day I showed up early. The monotony of “flipping beds”- trading in one set of azure sheets and pillowcase for another- permeated my days. The tedious cleaning of equipment frustrated me, as painfully undersized latex gloves expanded then burst, which lead to me handling chemically laden wipes with my unprotected, callused hands. My eyes grew weary as my swift hands slowed. Colored manila folders I ordered sequentially: evaluation, diagnosis, treatment plan, charts, medical records, insurance forms, and release forms. The work remained ceaseless; yet, my initial fervor for the hospital setting never dissipated. My service to Lahey ultimately rewarded me with the opportunity to shadow surgery.

Shadowing Doctor Tong at Lahey Hospital and Medical Center in Peabody, Massachusetts affirmed my interest in medicine. The deliberate, delicate workings of the human body are each so nuanced and vulnerable. Understanding its cumulative complexity is my goal. I see the transformative powers of medicine and I envision myself at the forefront of the movement. My affinity for the discipline prompts my desire to devote my life to contributing to the medical field and community. The key to my happiness is a life of good health; my goal is to provide that to the masses.

# Overcoming Negativity at an American High School 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.

“I hate coming to this school.” I vividly remember overhearing during the first week at my new school. I couldn't believe someone would say such a thing in America. Back in Japan, students certainly complained about school but never with such anger. However, over the next couple of weeks, I could see why my American classmates professed their hatred on a daily basis. Our campus was covered in graffiti with profanity written on the walls, along with constant vandalism and trash littering the bathroom floors. It seemed the students at my school were just zombies who attended classes out of obligation, rather than out of interest. As an outsider looking in, it was difficult not to succumb to the negativity of some of my peers. Instead, I focused on the positives and what I found is that American high schools have many advantages too. On my way to lunch, I spotted a large bulletin board filled with application forms for sports teams and clubs. Immediately, I was tingling with excitement. It seemed like a whole new world where a school could be used to develop my hobbies and interests. My previous schools in Korea tended to focus only on education, with every student rushing to leave at the final bell. Out of curiosity, I signed up for any and every club that interested me, hoping to make new friends and discover the benefits of my American education. After becoming more involved, I made friends and slowly learned the whole story about \*\*\*\* High School. Overall, it was a great place but it was not without its faults.There were many areas that required improvement and programs that desperately needed to be established. Instead of complaining, I decided to be proactive; I asked teachers and friends about the shortcomings they saw and invited opinions on how to improve. After listening, I jotted down potential solutions or ideas I had in mind. Even though I wasn’t confident whether I could make big changes, I decided to give it a try and scheduled a meeting with my principal to make a proposal. "I want to paint the school." The principal blankly stared at me with a perplexed look. "You want to do what?" I explained how painting our school will make our campus cleaner and promote a sense of belonging. Looking unsure, he told me I'm not allowed to alter any exterior walls due to school regulations but I was welcome to come back a week later with a formal written proposal. For a week after our conversation, I stayed up late at night thinking about how to make my plans a reality. In the end, what I proposed was bathroom mural project. Since it would be nearly impossible for me to paint all eighteen bathrooms by myself, I suggested that each club could adopt a bathroom and develop a theme related to their subject or interest. Unlike before, the principal gave his consent and club officers were more than happy to help out. As the president of Math Honor Society myself, I directed our club to paint our school’s mascot, “A Patriot,” outlined with mathematical equations. Even though the project is still in progress, all the improvements our school made in such a short amount of time made me extremely proud. It was gratifying to see teachers and students willing to cooperate and strive to create a better campus and community. Furthermore, I have learned to stay optimistic and to see the potential in the bad things, instead of capitulating to a negative atmosphere that threatened to take over our school. Even though I still occasionally hear people say "I hate coming to this school," I blame it on stress or their classes rather than the campus. After all, this place has become more welcoming and beautiful since I first started, what is there to complain about?

**Theatre, Failure, and What it Taught Me Anonymous**

**The lessons we take from failure can be fundamental to later success. Recount an incident or time when you experienced failure. How did it affect you, and what did you learn from the experience?**

Acting has always been one of my passions. Upon entering high school, I was excited to continue the acting I came to love in middle school. Unfortunately, I quickly hit a roadblock.As a freshman, I auditioned for the first play of the year, but I didn’t get a part. I was disappointed, but I understood, knowing that it was unlikely for a freshman to be cast. I auditioned for the second play, but again didn’t make the cut. The third play of the year was a musical, Cabaret. I felt confident, considering I had been cast in a lead role in all three middle school musicals. At the tryouts, I was one of the few freshmen to remain behind for solo auditions. I was determined to be more than “Ensemble #12.” When the cast list was posted, I went straight to the board... only to read that I had been cast as a sailor. An insignificant, non-speaking “Nazi Sailor.” I was disappointed, but I wasn’t discouraged. Actually, going through the rehearsal process and being part of the show as it came together solidified my love of the stage and made me eager to remain a part of Vistamar Theatre.In my sophomore year, I auditioned for the fall and winter plays but again wasn’t cast. My confidence dropped, and despite being enrolled in a drama class and helping with other aspects of the productions, I stopped feeling like a real part of the theatre community. I thought I had built a good relationship with the theatre director, but maybe he just didn’t like me. Maybe I wasn’t a good actor! All these thoughts filled my head, but thankfully, just like freshman year, when the third and last play of the year rolled around, I got a part! Sure, it was a tiny part, with only three or four lines, but it was a part-- a speaking role, and once again I felt like I belonged in Vistamar Theatre. This high continued as junior year started off strong. I auditioned for and received a lead role in the first play of the year, Accomplice, a complex murder-mystery with only four characters no less! The confidence I gained from my first major role was astounding. Suddenly I felt like I had made it. People looked up to me-- a theatre guy-- a title I still aspire to. In the second play of the year, I was only cast as an extra. I still loved being part of the process, but was determined to get another big role that year to solidify my presence in the program. The third play of the year was the popular musical Grease. I tried out for the lead role, Danny Zuko, because who wouldn’t want to play Danny? The callback sheet was posted the following day, and my heart sank when my name wasn’t listed under the Danny callbacks. Then, I noticed my name under the Kenickie callbacks. I was disheartened, but I gladly auditioned again anyway. The next day, the cast list was posted. I examined it, focusing on the roles of Kenickie or (maybe the director had had a change of heart!) Danny. My name wasn’t beside either role, but I was on the list, cast as Sonny LaTierri, the smooth-talking ladies man of the Greasers. At first I was discouraged, but as the rehearsal process progressed, I grew to love my role. When the show ended, I knew I would miss it. My confidence, already high after Grease, surged when I applied for and was granted a spot on the Theatre Banquet Committee, a group of only five students that helps to head the school’s Theatre department.Heading into senior year with this new leadership position, I can look back and know that it took patience and determination to endure failures on my way-- an important lesson I can apply throughout my life.

**Energy and the Environment Anonymous**

**Boston College strives to provide an undergraduate learning experience emphasizing the liberal arts, quality teaching, personal formation, and engagement of critical issues. If you had the opportunity to create your own college course, what enduring question or contemporary problem would you address and why?**

An issue I am deeply concerned with is the stability of our environment, because without a stable environment, life as we know it will be deeply affected on a global scale. In my junior year, I took AP Environmental Science, and many of the things I learned in that class sparked my interest in the preservation of the natural world. As a result of the knowledge I gained, I think a course based on energy and sustainability would be informative and relevant for the current generation. My course would address common methods of energy production such as fossil fuels, and students could be challenged to find ways to fix their flaws. Additionally, the multitude of alternative energy sources would be equally important to consider. Furthermore, many of the ways we use energy are inefficient, so finding a way to increase sustainability in our energy production and use is a critical issue. Because of the many forms of energy creation and use, my course would have no shortage of material.Energy is a necessity for our growing modern world, and every current large-scale means of its production, such as the combustion of coal and other fossil fuels, is harmful to the environment, or unsustainable in one way or another. As a result, a common goal for many scientists across the globe is to prevent the degradation of our planet by finding a sustainable, efficient, and environmentally friendly energy source. I think that creating a course based around these ideas would motivate more students to be interested in the topic, and in turn increase the number of students coming out of college with knowledge on the subject. This increased enthusiasm would add many smart young minds to the crucial effort to find a clean energy source, and highly increase the chance of a breakthrough. This is important because currently, not nearly enough emphasis is being put on our need to find clean energy, and I truly believe that finding a highly sustainable energy source will be a key discovery in our advancement as a society.

**Makeup Artistry and Social Justice Emily Luong**

**Human beings have a creative side that tends to shine most when we are truly invested in the world around us. Describe a situation when you responded effectively to a particular need and found yourself at your creative best.**

As a toddler, days at Grandma’s house were a colorless blur of television and snacks--that is, until naptime. Once the clock struck noon, I scuttled promptly into my aunt’s room and jumped under the covers, eyes screwed tightly shut in semblance of slumber until I heard my grandma’s footsteps walking away from the door. Then, the mission began.

1. Pull back covers.

2. Creep out of bed.

3. Tiptoe stealthily to my aunt’s drawers full of makeup.

Victory!

For that glorious hour, I would smear myself in lipsticks and eyeshadows so bright they left stains even after a shower. When time was up, I tried my best to cover my tracks--once in awhile, though, a drawer was left ajar in a tell-tale sign of my presence. Those naptimes are the root of my love for makeup today.

Eventually, I began purchasing my own cosmetics, and Fridays became what naptime once was--not party nights, but evenings for crafting avant-garde makeup looks, discovering new color combinations and placements onto my eyelids, and blending products into seamless gradients. I treasure the time spent losing myself in the therapeutic repetition of product application--an escape from the stress of unadulterated academia.

With the limited availability of makeup for women of deeper skin tones, most of us are essentially barred from expressing ourselves through this medium--which, come special-occasion season, is a problem. Everyone deserves to feel beautiful on their special day; skin tone should not interfere. It became my mission to combat outdated, Eurocentric beauty ideals by catering my makeup artistry toward women of color.

Once prom season came around, I found myself flooded with requests from similarly darker-skinned girls to do their makeup. The reason? Other amateur makeup artists tend not to carry products suitable for deeper skin-tones due to their limited availability in the market. I, as one of the few tan makeup enthusiasts in my school, became one of the only options--the only one with the materials for the job. There is a shortage of women of color in this industry and this is where I thrive.

Applying conventional appeals to beauty on a new canvas and watching my clients beam with newfound confidence is my favorite aspect of my business. Makeup artistry is not simply a vanity-driven hobby; for me, it offers a creative outlet while simultaneously allowing me to address and rectify the effects of discrimination against people like me.

**The Beauty of Simplicity Anonymous**

**The lessons we take from failure can be fundamental to later success. Recount an incident or time when you experienced failure. How did it affect you, and what did you learn from the experience?**

Two hours later, even with my cart stockpiled with an assortment of possible parts, I strode aisle-to-aisle scrutinizing each item, and mentally assembling the bits I had selected to generate the ideal model. It was hard to avoid the weird looks from parents as they pulled their children closer to pass me and my “madman mutter”. Having assumed the responsibility of purchasing the material to compete in the annual Massachusetts Science Olympiad for the event Wright Stuff, I was determined that our model plane would hover for the longest time possible, as per the prerequisite.

After the extended shopping spree, my partner and I pondered upon the design and mechanics of the model using the gamut of parts at our disposal. We built and tested various models, over and over again, before arriving at our “perfect” version. However, in order to add more “zing”, we complemented our creation with a rubber motor and a stabilizer, reasoning that these embellishments would ensure a superior lift and lengthier float, thereby providing us a better shot at winning.

“Your plane is disqualified”, pronounced the event coordinator at the initial check-in. “Rubber motors are prohibited.”

My partner and I exchanged flabbergasted looks; we had read through the rules comprehensively. How could we have overlooked this important regulation? My mind raced. My vision blurred. Not only was this ineligibility a personal embarrassment for us both, but our lame efforts would now affect the reputation of our high school, since a disqualification would reflect that our school did not follow the rules properly. And to think, this predicament was the result of us trying to make our plane more complex, rather than present it in its original simplicity.

As we exited the checking station with our heads downcast, our minds were racing to arrive at a solution to this impossible quandary. Not having brought any spare parts or a backup model, we needed a miracle. In a sheer act of desperation, I lunged for a piece of dirty, footprint-marked oak tag paper that lay superfluously on the floor. “Perhaps we could create a plane out of this,” I exclaimed to my partner. My partner grabbed the paper and then knelt on the floor, immediately fashioning several folds. The material shifted hand-to-hand, from my partner to me; oblivious of the people walking around us ridiculing our efforts, we developed an original plane. Quickly, after testing the modest prototype a couple of times, I added some more folds on the wings, and then rushed to check it in, wanting desperately to save our school's reputation.

A couple of hours later, during the competition, as we observed models with sophisticated designs created from wood as well as plastic, we recognized that our plane was essentially an ordinary fish in an ocean full of super sharks. One-by-one planes glided through the air; then it was our turn. My partner held the plane in his right hand, spun it around once, and released the plane with an elegant throw. The plane flew in circles, managing to stay afloat for almost twenty seconds. I was shocked; I had expected the plane to come crashing down after only two-to-three seconds. We high-fived and walking to our team’s room, joked about winning the event.

When an announcement declared our plane the winner, we were indubitably confounded; how could a model fabricated from discarded paper triumph over more expensive and comprehensive models? Significantly, this instance proved that complexity does not necessarily guarantee success; sometimes simplicity is key. Indeed, after this event, I have come to realize that many other well-known entrepreneurs, inventors, and thinkers share this reckoning – from Virgin Founder Richard Branson to famous Jazz musician Charles Mingus who is quoted to have stated: “Making the simple complicated is commonplace; making the complicated simple, awesomely simple, that’s creativity.”

Having learned this essential life-lesson, next objective: to invent, design, and impact the world through powerful simplicity.

**An Investment for Factory Workers Anonymous**

**Human beings have a creative side that tends to shine most when we are truly invested in the world around us. Describe a situation when you responded effectively to a particular need and found yourself at your creative best. (400 words)**

I never thought that, at 17 years old, I’d make a decision to spend $50,000. Last summer, I had a paid internship at Fresca Foods, a small manufacturing company. For six weeks, I worked in the Engineering, Technology and Continuous Improvement departments; my main project was to find cost savings on the cracker production lines. At first, I didn’t know where to start. I researched lean manufacturing, but decided the best place to look for problems was on the factory floor, observing the process and talking to workers.

Eventually, I became comfortable communicating with the workers, even speaking a little Spanish. I met people with very different life experiences from mine, such as a boy named Jose. Like me, Jose was 17 and in high school. In speaking with him, I learned about his circumstances and empathized with him. He had a long commute and worked 10-hour days on his feet. I realized that Jose faces many more challenges than I do. That’s when I truly became invested in my project. I wanted to make the workers’ jobs easier so they could reach their daily goals and earn bonuses.

A potential improvement I found was that a person had to manually weigh cracker packs to ensure they meet weight requirements. It was inefficient and impeded the process. On a different line, I saw that a machine automatically weighed the boxes and rejected those that didn’t meet requirements.

I wanted to propose purchasing this system for the cracker lines to increase throughput and redeploy a worker. But in talking to an equipment buyer, I experienced sticker shock. It cost $50,000! My boss told me I’d have to justify it with a business case, something I’d never done before. I performed time trials and pored over sales records. I crunched numbers to find the potential increased throughput and return on investment. I presented my plan, which clearly showed the savings, to executives on my last day. I was thrilled when they approved it.

During the internship, I found myself at my creative best: first finding a way to improve a manufacturing process I was unfamiliar with, and then justifying the equipment purchase with data. However, the most rewarding part was knowing I’d be helping make the workers’ jobs easier and that the savings gained would be used to give them bonuses.

**Your Name Anonymous**

**The lessons we take from failure can be fundamental to later success. Recount an incident when you experienced failure. How did it affect you, and what did you learn from the experience?**

Inside a concrete church filled with stacks of children and thick, humid air, an old fan in the corner was my only source of comfort. I watched as a microphone was being passed around, frightfully heading my way like a pistol in a game of Russian roulette. “OK, this time I’m going to make a good impression,” I thought to myself. Finally, the mic landed in my hand. I nervously cleared my throat, but before I could speak, shouts broke out from the crowd. “James!” Three dozen children affectionately echoed my name as I stood there dumbfounded and overjoyed.

Wistfully, I must admit that the children ministries from previous summers weren’t as successful as this. Despite the blazing sun, disconnection from civilization, and discomforting surroundings, I was somewhat optimistic. Our mission group had vaguely believed everything would flow smoothly and according to schedule after being welcomed by the villagers. But during our time in Indonesia, the children were apprehensive, alerted by the presence of foreigners. The ministry turned out to be a complete failure.

The next year, members of our mission trip focused on the quality of our activities to compensate. Every week leading up to our trip, we exhaustively prepared eye-catching performances to entertain the villagers and overcome the language barrier. But this time too, our plan did not succeed as we fell short of our goal to interact and sincerely touch the hearts of the children on Nias Island.

So when I went back a third time, I knew I needed a different approach. The first day of lunch, I noticed a boy shyly looking me from the corner. I asked for a translation, “How do I say ‘What is your name in Indonesian?’” Siapa namamu. Forthwith, I approached the boy and hesitantly asked “Siapa namamu?” His eyes lit up, and he put his hand gently to his chest and said “Nama saya Tian.” Tian, what a nice name. In response, I said with a smile “Nama saya James.” He wildly shook his head, and we exchanged laughter.

Twenty minutes later when dividing children into group activities, I saw Tian plowing his way through the crowd, determined to be the first in my line. When he arrived front of me, I enthusiastically called his name and patted him on the head. Tian grinned as others looked on with surprise and curiosity about our acquaintance. Other kids then jostled and jockeyed for position to join Tian and my group. Suddenly, we were the center of attention of everyone. My church members looked at me jealous and perplexed. Surprised myself, I shrugged and whispered ‘Use their names.’

I had never seen kids smiling and laughing this loud before that day. Each time we spoke their name in broken Indonesian, they giggled uncontrollably. Regardless of the activities, they seemed to have the time of their lives. For the rest of the week, we became closer each day. Kids followed us everywhere, constantly pleading for hugs or to hold their hands. On the last day, kids were reluctant to let us go. While leaving our team was crowded with flocks of kids to send us off.

On the return flight home, I realized all the dances, dramas, and music that aimed at making us closer to children fell on deaf ears without a way to relate. The purpose of our ministry is building personal connections. Language barriers and cultural differences were excuses for our failures from previous trips. I had neglected the small details that are crucial to any relationship. My encounter with Tian started a small revolution in my life. Before, Tian was just one of many kids in Nias; however, when I spoke his name, he became more than a kid, he became Tian. My time on Nias taught me that namamu (name) is more than just a word, it’s an identity.

**Creating a College Course Anonymous**

**If you had to create a college course, what would it be?**

If I were to create my own college course, I would focus on the question, “How can we, the students of Boston College, use Catholic teachings in order to unify America in a time of discord?”

Everyday in the news I see protests and violence; the country is as divided as it has ever been! I fear for the foundation of our country and wonder if we will ever be able to live again in harmony. Yet during Mass, I hear wonderful readings about living through the love of Jesus, and I try to demonstrate that in my life. It’s through others that I feel a sense of unity within my community. So now, how can we take these values and make a true difference in our nation?

I would design the course to be a seminar class. As professor, I would challenge students to acquire a deeper understanding of the Roman Catholic faith and American social issues. The course would not necessarily be intended to proselytize the Catholic faith. Instead of urging students to work as missionaries, I would encourage them to be leaders and problem solvers, seeking to truly value social justice and national pride. The course would have three main strands integrated together to answer the main question of how to make positive change. The first strand would involve a study of diverse cultures and the elements that bring people together. Students would need to learn about the history of American culture as well as its past failures and successes. The second strand would involve students researching Catholicism to identify the morals and values that are the framework of the religion. Lastly, the third element would be to engender the development of leadership principles by engaging students in activities to organize, motivate, and lead others. Tying all three strands together, students would be expected to devise strategies on how to use their Catholic values to bring people together and create a sense of unity and identity.

The culminating activity would be the development and sharing of a problem-solving stratagem to forge unity and ameliorate social dissonance. Each student’s plan would be evaluated on the contribution it provides to increasing social unity and improving the wellbeing of all Americans. I believe that it is through harnessing the synergy of diverse viewpoints and focusing many individual talents on positive change that we can overcome internecine discord and disunity.

**My House, My Beginnings of Adulthood Anonymous**

**Common App**

In the fall of my freshman year, my father came home from work with the widest grin I had ever seen. He posed one of those life-altering questions that most would ponder for days instead of minutes. “Do you want to use some of that money you’ve been saving”? he blurted out. This was followed by, “If so, let’s get going.” Stunned, I quickly followed him out the driveway and two blocks down the street. I had been trying to save every dollar I earned through odd jobs because it seemed natural that saving was the right thing to do. Nevertheless, my questions tripped over each other as I tried to get a sense of where this journey was taking me; however I was ready for the adventure! The future had now become the present, and I recognized the demands of adulthood had crept up on me in a rush.

Ten minutes later, I stood before a run-down ranch house. The windows were cracked, the doors were rotted, and the property was overgrown with rambling vines. Nonetheless, it had a kind of down-on-its-luck fascination for me. The prospect of owning property drew me like the proverbial moth to a flame. I learned no one had lived there for over fifteen years, but it could have been fifty for all I knew. I recall thinking my dad was crazy, yet he convinced me to buy it. I put up my life’s savings and when everything was done, I paid for a whopping seven percent of the property.

The first thing my investment reaped was a long Friday ripping out bushes and creating new flower beds. Halfway through the day, four police cars arrived and questioned my buddies and I about why we weren’t in school and what we were doing trespassing on this vacant property. Filled with innocent hubris, I boldly explained, “This is my house,” to which I was unceremoniously scoffed at. “Didn’t I look the role of a suburban squire,” I murmured to myself? Four hours and a few phone calls later, I left the local constabulary and returned to my landscaping. I never felt so mortified, yet so proud to have joined the ranks of American homeowners and adulthood.

Three years and seemingly a lifetime of growing up have since ensued. I have spent months ripping out walls, removing nails and replacing windows. After being shoulder deep in bathroom plumbing, I will never take an operating toilet for granted. Sometimes, I would be alone there during the late hours of the evening, fighting off hunger while having that night’s homework hanging over my head. Because my dad works seven days a week, oftentimes fifteen hours a day, I recognize that time can be a valuable asset.

In retrospect, I’ve learned much about myself. For me, buying my “brick castle” and becoming a landlord was less about the investment and more about discovering who I was and how I fit into the world. It’s been a deeply individual quest for finding my identity. I have found the keys are learning patience, keeping focus, and consciously accepting responsibility for independent decisions. I’m reminded of a quote from Einstein, “Try not to become a man of success, rather become a man of value.” When I entered the door to my first house, I thought I was a man who had achieved the ultimate prize. Now more than ever, I understand it was my entryway into adulthood and being a man of value.

**Summer Camp Anonymous**

**The lessons we take from obstacles we encounter can be fundamental to later success. Recount a time when you faced a challenge, setback, or failure. How did it affect you, and what did you learn from the experience?**

Despite what he meant to me, I won’t tell you his name; that privilege was signed away as part of camp counselor protocol.

I moved myself under the rock wall. The dense heat rising from the tire pieces covering the floor paired with the green light reflecting from a nearby slide created an environment that was warm, albeit unusual. One of his hands fiddled with the knotted necklace around his neck, while the other was wrapped around his knees as if to indicate that my presence was not wanted. Even as I placed myself next to him, his dark eyes remained cast down.

Silence.

“The others are playing cops and robbers,” I started in a tone bright enough to parallel my strikingly yellow camp counselor t-shirt, “You could be a cop?”

“I don’t like cops” he murmured.

“Well you could be a robber then,” I suggested.

“You think I like to steal?” he said pointedly, looking up at me for the first time.

I hastily assured him that I didn’t, and asked what he actually liked to do instead. Well, he liked a lot of things. Large dark guns were one, a very unusual card game another. But it wasn't until he started describing medieval torture methods, however, that I began plotting my escape. I looked around anxiously. Finally, an angel appeared: my perfectly blonde, perfectly articulate and, most importantly, perfectly normal five-year-old saving grace. I followed her away. His eyes followed me as I left.

I felt absolutely fine with it; relieved even. It wasn’t until I was walking home at the end of the day did I realize something.

I had failed. Completely and utterly.

Years of complex chemistry labs and hopeless math exams and somehow, someway, this child who stood only slightly higher than my hip was a problem I could not solve. He was all too unfamiliar, and for that reason I was all too scared. But not uncharacteristically, I was still determined.

I sat next to him, under that rock wall, every day during free play that week. Every day I would try talking to him, and some days he would even talk back. I found out he liked to draw, and for the next weeks I would bring in a little three pack of crayons and a piece of printer paper I kept folded in my pocket. Some days, he would even let me color with him. At nights, I would read through books, articles, anything I could find to help me figure him out. I would talk to my friends, family, anyone that would listen, just trying to gather advice. Gradually, slowly, I learned about his cultural background, his family life, what his future would look like. Everything. I used what I now knew, and what I already had seen to begin connecting with him.

One day, he wasn’t sitting under the rock wall.

One day, he was sitting on top.

It wasn’t one thing I said or thought or did that had him sitting up there. It was rather a combination of things. A combination of approaches, ideas, and emotions. At first I searched the books for a clear answer; but as I found, the theoretical world can only act as a guide. A problem that complex could only be solved by the emotional mosaic that makes us human, not the black and white lettering in any textbook. Human experience, empathy, and intuition are all factors in complex problem solving, and that’s what I felt as I used every ounce of whatever was inside me to peel him apart layer by layer. And that’s what I feel now as I solve problems in my everyday life. I put it in context. I rely on my gut. I learn as much as I can. That’s what he taught me, that little boy who stood only slightly higher than my hip. He taught me to think.

And I’m sorry I cannot tell you his name.

**Creative Solutions Anonymous**

**Human beings have a creative side that tends to shine most when we are truly invested in the world around us. Describe a situation when you responded effectively to a particular need and found yourself at your creative best**

With all the commotion I heard, I thought someone had set a batch of chocolate chip cookies on fire again. But the world of a high school dorm is seldom that predictable. No, nothing was burning. The sophomore girls running into my room sweated and teared and gasped not out of reaction to some current catastrophe, but rather out of fearful anticipation for tomorrow’s polyatomic ions quiz.

The polyatomic ions quiz is completely tantalizing, so I understood how they felt; what I didn’t understand was how to help. I had completed two years of chemistry, so the extended list of polyatomic ions could easily be recited in my sleep. And from what I best remember, the way I learned was straight memorization.

But looking around, that’s not something I could tell them. They expected me to have an answer, so I started creating one. I sat them down in a little semi circle on my carpet, grabbed a notebook and a sharpie, and started writing. Then I stopped. They didn’t like numbers. At the moment, they didn’t really like science either. The best thing I could do for them right then was to turn something hated and unfamiliar into something they knew and loved. Sophomore girls love drama. So I started telling stories.

I started with “Clo,” a woman who had three kittens, and she died. Her name was the elements, the three kittens represented the subscript, and the charge the loss of life:ClO31-.She was only the beginning. I continued to add characters based on ions, slowly making my way through the entire list. Occasionally, the girls would chime in and add key sub-plots, and together we would laugh and talk about our made up characters lives. At times, I forgot that what we were talking about was actually chemistry, and I’m sure they did too. Before we knew it, we had woven an entire world within the polyatomic ions.

The next morning, the chemistry teacher stopped me in the hallway and congratulated me on my girls doing so well on their quiz. She noticed some odd little scribblings of phrases and sketches of people in the margin of each of their quizzes, and had absolutely no idea what they meant. To her, they meant nothing. For the girls, ClO31 will always be just “Clo.” But to me, the ions will always represent more: a passageway towards a world that combines innovation and imagination.

**The Gallon Challenge Anonymous**

**Free prompt - "CommonApp" Essay**

On Thursday, July 10th, I learned an essential lesson about ambition.

I walked optimistically through the grand Springer Opera House entranceway, ready for a day of captivating classes and wild theatre kids. I saw my friends and migrated downstage left with my water jug in hand. It was really just a gallon of Chick-fil-A sweet tea refilled with water. Similar jugs were dispersed across the stage because of The Gallon Challenge trend, where one attempts to drink an entire gallon of water before the end of the day. When done correctly (with proper restroom breaks and distributed drinking times), the challenge encourages hydration. I was fully prepared to mask my competitive nature behind this healthy bandwagon. The night before, I had washed out the remaining sweet tea, filled my jug with water, and made the final decision: I will complete The Gallon Challenge.

With high self esteem, I chugged at any given opportunity. Before class, I chugged; during transitions, I chugged; but especially during lunch… I chugged. I reasoned with myself that if I finished by the end of the day, then I would be a successful participant. But if I finished by the end of lunch… I would be a champion. I became greedy with the idea of victory and drank until only small water droplets remained in the bottom of the jug.

I remember the high fives, the fist bumps, the shoulder pats, and the hugs. I remember the uneasy feeling in my stomach, and I remember thinking “Well, this is just what it feels like to be a champion!” I remember realizing that there was a real problem. I remember rushing to the closest teacher and asking to go to the bathroom. If only I could have made it out the door. I remember the moment that things went horribly wrong: I yakked up a gallon of water in front of all of my closest friends and mentors.

After July 10th, The Gallon Challenge was officially banned from the Springer Theatre Academy. I briefly considered never showing my face within two miles of the Springer Opera House ever again. Nonetheless, I write this essay as a current Academy student who was originally known to many of her best friends as “Abbey Crowley: The girl Who Got The Gallon Challenge Banned Because She Drank Too Much and Threw Up.”

While sitting in the office and waiting for my mom to pick me up, I was given time to think about exactly where things went wrong. I realize that there is a fine, fine line between proper water intake and embarrassingly inappropriate water intake, which I learned not only at the expense of my health and my reputation, but everyone else’s ability to complete the challenge in the future. Even though I still try to drink a gallon of water every day, I will never try to drink it all before lunch. But I had an even greater revelation: I easily could have completed the challenge in its intended form, but I was overly ambitious and too competitive. I realize now that there are healthier outlets to challenge my competitive nature.

**Internationally Welcome Lauren von Thaden**

**A problem you’d like to solve. Explain its significance to you and what steps you took or could be taken to identify a solution.**

“Where from?”

“United States”

“WELL-COME,” joyously declared a little kid from a Bedouin tribe in Jordan. Surrounded by ancient tombs, a sandy landscape, and locals wrapped in head scarves selling items from their tents, I felt out of place. Yet, this little boy’s cuteness combined with his tattered clothing and surprising use of English had me captivated. Our short moment together was a connection between two different worlds and cultures. Although our backgrounds are vastly different, both the Bedouin youth and myself accepted each other. We accepted our current ways of life, whether that be as a tourist in Petra, or as a child who is a proud member of a loyal tribe. This is what I desire, acceptance between peoples and cultures, no matter what religion, ethnicity, or class.

“Why have you visited Israel? Why are you traveling back and forth between Jewish and Muslim countries? I AM WATCHING YOU,” barked a Lebanese security guard at the Beirut airport.

The distrust displayed by the security guard emphasized the heightened fear and insecurity in Lebanon. The security guard, however, was only one of many distrustful citizens in the country. Covering the streets of Beirut were armed guards with large machine guns driving around in army vehicles. Many people I encountered, which consisted of Middle East experts and Syrian refugees, seemed on edge and fearful about the neighboring countries. Considering the present situation in Syria, this reaction is understandable. However, this is not a peaceful way to live. My hope for Lebanon in the future is that all its citizens feel safe and out of harm’s way.

I want to be the person to connect societies and improve international relations and economic resources, especially between war-torn countries, where trust is a luxury. As an intern at Carnegie Endowment for International Peace in Beirut, I worked with international relations experts to understand the current Middle East situation further, including the explosive growth in population and attendant low living standards and unemployment that were the Arab Spring’s root causes and catalysts. I learned that leaders of Islamic nations can have total authoritarian control over their devout people due to followers’ fear of being identified for disobedience. When their leaders call upon them to fight they become radicalized, committing horrid acts of violence in the name of Allah. Traveling through Israel, Jordan and Lebanon, I viscerally absorbed the region’s history and tensions, truly seeing and feeling the context of these people’s lives and how this fuels their beliefs and actions.

Returning from the Middle East, I reflected on the problems of conflict and mistrust even in my small Menlo Park community where racial and religious separation thrives. I have Muslim, Black, and Hispanic friends, and I dislike the way they are immediately judged based on their race or religion. A Muslim friend was once asked jokingly if her backpack was closed because she had a homemade bomb in it. While walking around town with my black friends, I have been asked if I was part of a gang. When I witness and experience these confrontations, I take the initiative and stand up for these disrespected individuals, using the moment as an opportunity to empower my friends and open the minds of prejudiced individuals.

By immersing myself in these Middle East societies, I gained first-hand understanding of, and important insight into, a dramatically different culture. Solving the world’s problem of distrust and building multi-cultural empathy is critically important to me because it is vital to dissolving conflict. Awareness of different beliefs creates more sympathy for struggling communities. If we are all cognizant of our connections as members of one overarching tribe, mankind, we will strive to understand each other and help, not hurt, other cultures.

I will never forget these experiences both from near and afar. They will live in me forever and nourish my quest for peace as I strive to seed “WELL-COMEs” throughout the world.

**Personal Statement 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.**

In my hometown, Nanchang, China, the Gan River divides the city into two worlds. One side of the river has enjoyed much government investment: skyscrapers are adorned with beaming neon lights, and beacons are announcing the economic prosperity of China.

I grew up on the other side of the river. Most of my childhood was spent running through rich rice paddies, catching grasshoppers, and listening to my neighbors speaking with a sense of envy about the other side of the river. They would always remind me of an old Chinese proverb, “a knowledgeable person travels ten thousand miles.” They encouraged me to go out, and see the broader world.

Is the outside world better? This question haunted me and motivated me to travel—ten thousand miles from home to Tanzania in the summer of 2015 on a service-learning trip.

Following our Tanzanian guide, Alex, through the countryside, I was entranced by lush green maize fields, straw-roofed huts, and pastures for cattle, goats and sheep. Soaking in all the beauty, I started to believe that perhaps things in the outside world were, indeed, better, just as my neighbors had promised. But the thought made me feel uneasy.

This feeling kept me up that night as I lay in a sleeping bag on the cold ground inside one of the huts. I shivered, not because of the cold but because of my thoughts. I decided to get up and go for a walk. When I opened the door, I saw Cassia, a Canadian girl in our program, lying on a blanket outside.

“What are you doing here? Don’t you feel cold?” I asked.

“Cold? What are you talking about?” She chuckled and invited me to lie down beside her.“Look up! I bet you couldn't see constellations this clear back in the city.”

“Actually, I often see them in my hometown,” I answered, with my thoughts going backto my childhood.

“Really? Tell me about your home,” exclaimed Cassia. Suddenly, the voice of my neighbors murmuring that proverb echoed in my ears. However, looking at Cassia’s eager face, I pushed forward. “It was not very developed, but I loved to run barefoot in the rice paddies...”That was the first time I had narrated my childhood in the context of my hometown, and I feltrelieved. I ended with the phrase: “I’m embarrassed to tell you that my hometown wasn't that developed.”

“Why should that be embarrassing? I bet your hometown is just as beautiful as Tanzania!”

A chill went down my spine. A voice inside my head cried out, “Yes!” I finally understood where my uneasiness came from—I had so easily accepted the beauty of Tanzania but had never appreciated the same beauty of my own hometown. My upbringing, the people around me, had given me the wrong motivation to travel around the world.

I found the reason for my insecurity when I was interacting with urban friends at school or sharing the story of my hometown with strangers. I wondered how I could go out and meet the world if I never truly appreciated where I came from. How could I love diversity, and embrace the actual meaning of the proverb, if I did not even appreciate my own identity? I vowed to look past my prejudice against my hometown, and treasure the culture and values that have made me the person I am today.

On the plane leaving Tanzania, I looked out the window and saw the pastures and farm fields again. As I looked at the landscape, the maize fields of Tanzania began to merge with the rice paddies of Nanchang in my mind. Unable to distinguish the two, I felt equally strong love for both. I knew I would carry this love with me into the future.

**Globalization 101 Anonymous**

**Boston College strives to provide an undergraduate learning experience emphasizing the liberal arts, quality teaching, personal formation, and engagement of critical issues. If you had the opportunity to create your own college course, what enduring question or contemporary problem would you address and why?**

On the backseat of a vehicle driven by a Maasai guide, I was able to view the city of Arusha in great detail through the window. While searching for distinctive cultural elements, I was distracted by the ubiquitous commercials along the street. “Coco Cola”, “Pepsi”, “Vodacom”, and “Huawei” fought for prime advertising spaces on guide boards and walls around every corner. Those commercials elicited an illusion. Am I really in Tanzania?

The Maasai driver bragged about his gallantry for killing a lion, but his denim jacket and expensive sunglasses evinced little credibility. A Tanzanian lion slayer should wear the traditional red gown; at least the figures illustrated in Maasai Warrior appeared so.

Those superimposing foreign commercials in a Tanzanian city disclosed the power of globalization and a trend of culture homogenization. The additional thought of a research paper I read, which stated that almost a quarter of world languages became extinct due to globalization, convinced me that the diffusion of popular culture indeed posed a threat to cultural diversity in the world.

Not long after the drive, I was alarmed in a workshop discussing Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), a physically-devastating and cruel practice performed as a ritual by indigenous tribes including the Maasai. However, in this case, thanks to globalization, medical knowledge was slowly introduced and had saved some kids in the tribe from complications and inhumane practice. Globalization became a solution.

The dilemma of globalization, I believe, lies on the standpoint from which one views the issue. I believe that discussions about this multifaceted topic in a college with a diversity of students will produce inspirational insights and enlightening outcomes. With this belief, I hope to create a college level course titled “Balance on Globalization”, a research-oriented course which encourages students to explore the ways to maximize the welfare brought by globalization and minimize negative externalities.

The merit of this course is in its interdisciplinary nature incorporating subjects ranging from economics, public health, history, and international relations. Students from any major should be able to take the advantage of such a course and contribute from their own realms of knowledge; in return, their awareness of globalization is likely to be furnished as they exchange perspectives with other students.

**A Tree and a Boy Anonymous**

**The open response of the common application essay.**

From Ohio to Kentucky to Massachusetts, some may call me crazy for having three different trees as my best friends, but I assure you that I am perfectly sane. For my first birthday, my grandparents flew to Ohio and gave me my first birthday present, a tree. The maple tree was planted in our backyard, and I always tried to crawl towards it. Crawling soon became walking, and walking became running.

After running, I only wanted to climb. I tried to climb the tree every day. The result was always the same: failure. I was only able to reach the top with the help of my parents. From the peak of the tree, I created many imaginary adventures. On Mondays, I fought mighty dragons that breathed fire. I explored deep caverns filled with sparkling treasure on Wednesdays, and on Fridays, I was a cowboy in the Wild West running from two sheriffs, my mom, and dad. My tree was also a place of peace. My mom read picture books to me under its shade. I loved Eric Carle’s books, especially “The Very Hungry Caterpillar.” When my family left my tree in West Chester, Ohio for Bowling Green, Kentucky, I was filled with the mixed emotions of excitement for a new town and sadness of leaving the only place I knew as home. Entering the new house, my parents told me that I would soon have a baby brother. I jumped up screaming with joy and kicked the moving boxes as hard as I could breaking three snowglobes in the box. I finally had a friend to play with every day of the week.

A new maple tree was also planted near my new swing set in our backyard. My brother and I spent the humid summer days eating popsicles and swimming in the ice-cold water of our pool. The tree would grow arms and legs to help me in my quest to save my brother from the vicious sea serpent, my dad, that lived in the murky waters of Lake Doom, our pool. We were always victorious. My family traveled home to Ohio for a short visit after living in Kentucky for two years. The gorgeous maple tree now towered over me, but I still attempted to climb the impressive figure. I failed. After my last day of kindergarten, we packed our suitcases into the car; I was moving to Boston. I was excited to see my extended family, but I knew I would miss my friends. Living with my grandparents while our house was being built, my mom decided that another tree would be planted in our backyard. Over the last ten years, it has been used as cover for epic snowball and water balloon fights with my neighbors and family. The tree is first base in kickball, and the seventh hole in soccer golf, which uses feet and soccer balls instead of clubs and golf balls. Playing with Nerf swords and shields while acting like knights with my cousins, I am able to stand watch over the entire kingdom from atop of the tree, which serves as the main guard tower to Castle Blackspire, my house. The tree is the first Pokémon gym in our family’s quest to “catch ‘em all” while imitating Ash Ketchum. It is now my favorite place to read during the summer alone and with my family.

During the summer following my junior year, my family visited the Cincinnati area for a week. I gazed at the incredible maple tree that soared over me. I sprinted towards the tree fully knowing I would definitely be able to climb it without any help. I did. Now, a new tree looms waiting to be climbed. I am confident that I will be able to ascend any tree, while my own roots and branches will continue to stretch and grow.

**Less Money, More Memories Anonymous**

**The lessons we take from obstacles we encounter can be fundamental to later success. Recount a time when you faced a challenge, setback, or failure. How did it affect you, and what did you learn from the experience?**

It was as though Medusa had looked me straight in the eye. I saw my mother’s lips moving, but all I could hear was the turbulent rhythm of my heavy heart. I clutched my fork tighter in my fist and disappeared, desperately figuring out how to turn back the hands of time.

My father uttered my name and brought me back down to Earth, “It just makes sense Abia.”

Hours before, my mother had received a call— a job offer to work in a hospital. It seemed perfect. However, there was a catch, as always: we would have to move to Long Island, away from my school, my friends, and my childhood. Although I was starting to prepare for my junior year and getting more involved in the school community, I would’ve hated to break my mother’s heart. “We’ll visit often dear,” my parents reassured me, “and plus you won’t have to share a room with your sister anymore." I obliged happily, considering my parent’s risks in this decision, yet I still had hope that maybe, just maybe we wouldn’t have to leave.

After months of denial, I stood in front of my family’s new castle, grand yet spiritless. I reminisced about the cacophonous streets of New York. I couldn’t hear the piercing police sirens, the blaring horns, the boisterous crowds. This was not my concrete jungle; it was a suburban desert.

The days in my new school were reasonable. Everyone I met treated me with kindness, but I could not help but feel alone. I simply missed how everything used to be. I even started to miss sharing a room with my irritating younger sister. I realized I had always taken for granted the effect of companionship on my own mental health. After sitting alone for weeks in a cafeteria filled with laughter and conversation, I started to pass time by recounting memories. I could not forget my Staten Island circle. Eventually, I concluded that the secret to understanding the real value of friendship is not found in the complexity, but the simplicity of the bond. Even today... inside jokes, venting stress, and celebrating successes with close friends are some of the most priceless gifts I hold with me. Back at home, I was surprised to learn I was not alone in my feelings. My parents found it difficult to focus on relaxing and being happy after they came home from work as well; they also missed the convenience of close coworkers and relatives. After carefully outlining our financial situation over many weeks and feeling unusually distant from one another, my family decided to move back home.

I have yet to fully grasp the concepts of destiny and fate, but I am learning the value of coincidental situations. After being welcomed with a surprise party in my own home, I became even closer with friends who I had left behind for many months. We shared stories of happiness and of sadness through laughter and tears. Following that came a great improvement in my commitment to my schoolwork. I became even more involved in my community than I was before and continued my position in National Honor Society.

Today, I keep a memory box in my room. This box, filled with my “trivial” treasure, seems like a cardboard box of clutter to my parents, but to me, they are hand-cut diamonds in my box of riches. My friendships and my family are directly correlated to my happiness. From polaroids and movie tickets to restaurant receipts and old MetroCards, my memory box is a beautiful reminder of who I am and where I come from.

**Brotherly Acceptance and Pride Anonymous**

**When you choose a college, you will join a new community of people who have different backgrounds, experiences, and stories. What is it about your background, your experiences, or your story, that will enrich our colleges community? OR speak of a person who has impacted your life the most.**

I find it humorous when my family debates who looks more Asian versus White, me or my twin brother. My parents also joke that Brandon and I would be even taller or better at math had it not been for the “shortcomings” each contributed to our genetic equation. However, when comparing my brother to me, that is where the humor ends.

While we were born extremely premature, weighing two pounds, Brandon suffered greater complications in the NICU than I did. Despite being born only minutes apart, our lives quickly diverged and we have been on different paths ever since. Brandon suffered from a brain hemorrhage that left him with learning disabilities. He has also been diagnosed with autism and suffers from epilepsy. I have watched him struggle with many things others take for granted. For Brandon, school is much more challenging and college far less likely.

Being around Brandon my entire life, I didn’t comprehend these differences until I began to observe the normative behaviors of my peers, which were in stark contrast to the manner in which he behaved. Brandon's social challenges, early lack of coordination, and absence of empathy towards others left me agonizing over how others thought of him, and subsequently, of me. It was not until my father sat me down in 7th grade and fully explained the scope of Brandon's condition, that I reflected on my selfish attitude. It was during this talk I first learned the term “autism,” and of Brandon's place on the spectrum. That this single word could lessen much of the confusion I felt towards Brandon was an epiphany. It also allowed me to completely reevaluate my attitude towards him, and reflect on the impact he has had on my life.

Despite these challenges, Brandon never complains or gives up. His attitude and effort are an inspiration to me. I have seen firsthand how hard work and a positive attitude can help you achieve more than others may think you are capable of. Brandon has also helped me keep my own challenges in perspective. I understand life is not fair and I have been given opportunities not everyone gets. For this reason, I am compelled and fully committed to making the most of them. But even more so, I am committed to always being there for Brandon and intend to make him as proud of me as I am of him.

**The Effects of 81 Years Anonymous**

**Discuss an accomplishment, event, or realization that sparked a period of personal growth and a new understanding of yourself or others.**

What if you were eighty-one years old when you saw a photo of yourself for the first time? Elma was.

We sounded joyless as we warbled, “Take me out to the balllllgame, take me out to the crowwdd, buy me some peanuts and crackerjacks…” our voices falling flat as we rushed through the final stanza. A dozen South African senior citizens applauded our tone-deaf performance.

My family and I were in Cape Town, visiting a local senior center, where the aroma of curry from the bean-and-vegetable chakalaka that was served for lunch hung enticingly thick in the room. We were participating in a cultural exchange, to learn about one another’s lifestyle.

When the South Africans sang in response, the men and women rose slowly, gripping tables for balance, and arranged themselves with purpose, standing erect. We had remained seated throughout our uninspired number; I felt embarrassed for having failed to afford them the same courtesy. A heavy moment passed while these octogenarians summoned every ounce of energy available to them. Then, an eruption. Stomping, clapping, harmonizing, swaying joyfully, they purred and roared through their song, telling a story in a language that wasn’t ours, a story they helped us understand through their inspired movements. The song celebrated life: the imperfectly perfect human form, bodies, voices, each other. On instinct, I took out my phone to film. What happened next transformed me profoundly.

When the singing stopped, a woman named Elma settled in next to me. With only one translator present, we tried to circumvent the language barrier with smiles and nods. I turned my phone toward Elma and pressed play. She squinted and looked incredulously at the screen, then back at me, and back at the phone. She then did the most unexpected thing. Elma pointed at her image, threw her head back, and laughed, her mouth cracking wide and full of delight, her shoulders and belly shaking in a paroxysm. More seniors gathered around the phone, the room bursting into applause and gleeful laughter, as many saw their image for the first time.

This joy moved me in complicated ways. For one, my American peers and I relentlessly critique our own image, excising unflattering parts of photos and deriding ourselves. (“I look so gross” is a common refrain.) This moment in South Africa taught me that such critical appraisal of our image is learned and not typical of all cultures. If we, like these senior citizens, weren’t overexposed to our image—in mirrors, on phones, on social media—could we be kinder to ourselves? I thought, too, about the politics, about what it meant to visit a community like this one, to observe and assess with my eyes and my phone, to revel in lessons available to me because of vast economic inequality. Yes, we had shared our cultures, but experiences like this needed to be more equitable, more ethical, less steeped in power.

In one of my sociology classes, we discussed the concept of the “gaze”, which describes how the act of ‘looking’ is intertwined with power. This experience in South Africa allowed me to see the reality of this theory for myself. Yes, we all had fun and laughed together while we viewed the video, but I had filmed it.

Since this day, my interest in pursuing sociological studies has only grown. Not only at a micro level—understanding how my friends and I perceive our own image—but also at a global level, exploring how the “gaze” sustains structures of power erected along lines of race, gender, sexuality, and ability. I’ve learned a lot, and I’m determined to stride toward changing these aspects of life. When I see my image, I will admire my freckles as sweet reminders of my job as a lifeguard. And when I look at others as a sociologist-in-training, I will reflect on what’s at stake and commit myself to ethical and equitable observation.

**A Turtle in a Cross Country Race Anonymous**

**Share an essay on any topic of your choice. It can be one you've already written, one that responds to a different prompt, or one of your own design.**

Bang! I am deafened by the sound of a gunshot, and suddenly I see hundreds of fourth-graders sprinting towards me. I am temporarily mesmerized by the massive blob of energy consisting of tiny legs moving in unison and tight fists swinging with determination. Right as I am about to be trampled, a row of bright orange cones prompts the leaders of the group to turn the corner. I am then swept back into reality as I remember my job for the day: I am a turtle in a cross country race.

As a turtle, it is my responsibility to run alongside the stragglers of the race to ensure that they eventually make it through the finish line, no matter how long it takes them to get there. Thus, after the last clump of children passes me, my work begins. I jump in behind them and begin to run. After the first minute or so has elapsed, the faces that once consisted of determination begin to fade into expressions of exhaustion. That is when I know I must step in. “You are doing amazing! I’m right here with you! You can do this!” My words elicit a response in the form of slightly faster steps from most children in the group and possibly an eye roll from a few.

As the race progresses, I continue my encouragement and urge the less exhausted runners to attempt to push ahead. This eventually thins out the back group until I am left with three girls who begin to walk. I exclaim that we are almost there and that I believe in them, but they only glance at me with discouraged looks. We walk for a moment as I remind them that it’s fine to take breaks as long as they never give up. Finishing, no matter how long it takes them to get there, is what matters. They should be proud of themselves.

With that said, the finish line comes into view. A pathway lined with brightly colored flags glistening in the sunlight brings back the determination on the girls’ faces. Together, they sprint to the end as I watch with satisfaction that they were able to persevere. I then slow to a stop and begin to prepare for the next race.

As I move back to my starting position, I remember my experience helping out with these meets during my freshman year. I was enthusiastic about my newly discovered speed so I only volunteered as a rabbit, leading the quickest group of kids through the race. I was excited for the opportunity to mentor the future generation of great runners, but I didn’t give much thought to the ones who would be at the back of the group. However, I have since learned that there is so much meaning and fulfillment that comes with helping those who are struggling.

Just as I love helping children tackle the challenge that is cross country races, I also want to help kids overcome their medical challenges as well. There are so many children who have fallen behind in the race of life due to medical circumstances out of their control. I want to be able to stand up for those kids and help them to persevere, similar to how I have been able to encourage kids through my experience as a turtle. This desire has led me to start a club at school where we send encouraging handmade cards to hospitalized children with the hope of bringing a smile to their faces.

AIn the future, I plan to expand my ability to help by becoming a pediatric nurse practitioner. I want to help young patients recover so that they are free to accomplish anything that they set their minds to, whether that be simply having fun, excelling in school or even competing in a cross country race.

**Future Nurse 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 have fallen in love with Thursdays. Why? Because I volunteer in the ER at Cleveland Clinic in Weston, Florida, constantly madcap organization, a symphony of coughing and wheezing, as well as electric energy. Whether it is consoling patients or discharging them, I am comforted knowing the small contribution I can make. When nurses soothe patients, it is as if they have some magical wand that eases the patients’ symptoms. Despite how busy the ER might be, with a small smile, I tell myself, “Bring it on!” I have chosen nursing because working with patients gives me the greatest satisfaction.

Thursday finally rolls around. I wheel in a middle-aged patient from the disarray of the ER waiting area. She cautiously holds a white towel against her tender right eye. Suddenly, she jerks forward in the wheelchair. I walk in front of the wheelchair. Oh my… Her ocean blue eye popped out of its socket. I call the nurse, and we manage to carefully rest her on the gurney. Somehow, once in the care of the nurse, the woman is calm.

It will be a busy morning. Now, an elderly man reaches for something under his bed. He is determined to finish the job he started. Knowing an accident could happen easily, I rush to his bedside. I search underneath the gurney to find his prized possession: his WWII veteran’s hat. I hand it to him as he thanks me profusely. He proudly places his cap against his white hair as he closes his eyes in exhaustion. A man with long, tangled hair who emanates a funky smell still maintains a haughty attitude even though he is homeless. He calls me “beauty” and himself “beast.” He is thankful for his cozy hospital bed, ultra soft blankets, and the strawberry jelly in a fancy plastic cup. When the nurses are with him, he is clearly content. Okay, fine. Beauty and the Beast does deserve some credit for putting him in a good mood, but I know the nurses did the majority of the work.

A code blue rings abruptly through the hospital. Within milliseconds, nurses and doctors sprint into the ER. Nurses administer life-saving drugs; doctors constantly rotate to perform CPR. I rapidly move out of the way. Disorganized organization. Every minute feels like a lifetime. I do my part by comforting the family in the waiting room; they have a thousand questions. “While unfortunately I do not have the technical answers for you, I can assure you that your father is in good hands.” They were so grateful I had given them a snippet of information; as small as it seemed to me, for them it was priceless.

And finally, another ambulance call. A 16 year old girl has cut her wrists. She is coming from a group home. Once she arrives, the police also arrive. The police Baker Act her. The girl is confused and scared. Despite everything, the nurses stay strong and help her through this process. As the medical team trickles out of the room, I go in to speak with the young girl. I sat next to her for a few minutes. I do not want her to feel alone.

While my experience in the ER is my primary motivation for wanting to become a nurse, there is one more important piece to the puzzle. That other piece is my cousin’s recent suicide, but it was not without purpose. His death was tragic, yet it led me to continue in my journey to obtain my BSN. I have been lucky enough to see and experience the real world of nursing, but I have been unlucky enough to witness the devastation of suicide. Together, they have formed a powerful catalyst of my future career: nursing.

**Watching, Listening, Creating Anonymous**

**Discuss an accomplishment, event, or realization that sparked a period of personal growth and a new understanding of yourself or others.**

"Someone must watch, it is said. Someone must be there."

When I first read this Kafka quote, young and ambitious, I set my goal as an artist to be "the watchman "of the world - to reveal the truth to the audience. Like many children, I was brought to various painting classes by my parents because of my love of art. I was taught to meticulously depicted and recorded beautiful scenes in nature-tonality and depth perfected, proportion precisely measured and layout carefully designed -like a camera or a photocopier.

My watershed was in that summer of eleventh grade. When asked to create a series of illustrations for the 50th anniversary of the Stonewall Riot, I was frustrated -the realism I so dutifully adhering to failed to convey my message. Looking at my work was as if reading cold definitions in Wikipedia: precise but void in content. They failed to capture the powerful incentive that empowers hundreds of people in Stonewall Inn, and a million others in the LGBTQ Community, to take on the fight for freedom.

How can I convey such elusive and abstract messages through a plain 2-D image? When I relate to my experience in the Pride celebration this summer, the image of a young gay couple emerged in front of my eyes. The rainbow flag on their back fluttered in the summer breeze, mingled with the sea of thousands of other colors: black, brown, yellow, and every other stripe on the American quilt. My hand that was ready to take out the camera stopped: "Why don't you physically go into their midst to feel their life?" I hesitated, but when the couple smiled at me and the sea of rainbow flags waved invitingly, I got the courage to walk among the marchers. "Out loud! Proud and gay! "they shouted, faces radiant with pride and their hands held tight. I did not know any of their names; but joining them, marching with them, I saw the message that my art is supposed to but had failed to convey.

Thus I realized the fundamental gap in my understanding of "truth". It is the difference between the definition in Wikipedia and the voices echoed when hundreds of people ranging in ages, ethnicities and gender expressions shout out the same simple but powerful slogan. It is the difference between drawing revolting bodies on the street and actually engaged with a community. It is the difference between surface manifestation that I want to depict, and the abstract but deeply meaningful message that art can convey.

When a moment of silence began, there was a somber awareness of the past discriminations suffered by the L.G.B.T.Q community. In that silence we made an unspoken commitment to face the future challenges together. I lowered my head, together with thousands of other people in the parade, feeling something large and meaningful flowing in my heart. It is at these moments I truly "watched": not something I see, but something I understand. Although most people that experienced the Stonewall Riot are no longer around to tell us their story, the truth lays immortal. It expands beyond the collective imagination of bodies revolting in the street to include a broader story about equality and acceptance.

To be the "watchman" is to capture and impart these revelatory understandings. Their eyes see not just pictures, but stories. This understanding endows my art with an authenticity beyond what can be offered by principles of tonality and contrast. A mature painter is a "watchman" using brushes, thoughts and feelings to share all aspects of an experience. Their artwork creates resonance and makes the gap between differences no longer unbridgeable.

**Little Drummer Boy Andrew Motey**

**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.**

Nickelback, Green Day, and Blink 182 shook the walls in my room as I let my mind wander. Tap, two, three, four, I thought, as the beat of Photograph vibrated around my room and slid into my ears. My pillows became a drum set and the carpet converted into a vibrant crowd. I gave astounding performances and the eager audience demanded an encore. One night, after countless performances, I crept into my parents’ bedroom and nervously asked them, “Can I drum?” Both enthusiastically agreed.

Drumming has been a vital part of my life since I was nine years old. I began with just a pair of drumsticks and a rubber practice pad. I beat this pad for hours every day for a year to prove to my parents that I was dedicated to the instrument. My siblings hated the noise, but I knew my parents were happy I was focusing my energy on something constructive. I initially learned how to properly grip the drum sticks, and soon after, I caught on to the rudiments that ground every drummer. I learned double stroke rolls, triple paradiddles, and flam accents. After mastering these key patterns, I was able to apply my foundation to a multitude of genres, ranging from fusion jazz to progressive rock.

That first year of drumming worked wonders in my life. At first I learned to appreciate the instrument, and it slowly became a creative outlet for me. Later, drumming helped me learn other skills that have become a part of the fabric of my daily routine. Through drumming, I learned organizational skills as well as diligence and commitment, which drove my academic and athletic successes. In school, I often caught myself tapping my feet or hands which kept me sharp during class lectures. At home, tapping sustained my attention while studying and made me more productive. Similarly, I have always enjoyed solving difficult math problems. After hours of hard work, a drumming break helps me come up with new creative solutions.

Additionally, the discipline I learned from drumming influenced my athletic pursuits. I have played tennis and soccer for years, and I am capable of giving my best effort when I hear these beats in my head and feel them ring around my body. These rhythms improve my coordination and reflexes, and take my mind off the exhaustion.

Not only does drumming improve my cognitive function and athletic skills, it has helped me connect with those around me in a more profound way. I am in a band with four other people, and when we play, we form a connection like no other. There is no mistaking this sense of unity when playing music together: the feeling of blissfully constructing a mosaic of colorful sounds that form a repertoire of riffs and chord progressions. Drumming in a band has made me less self-centered and more people-centered. I’ve learned that taking time to really get to know others can lead to more than just great musical synergies–it leads to stronger friendships.

On the other hand, when I’m alone, drumming gives me an escape from all other parts of my life. If I have a bad day, I drum. If I have a great day, I drum. I seize the moment every time I whip those sticks down on the snare, and I can feel the waves of every beat pulse through me when I ride the hi-hat. Drums always find a way to take away my worries and give me time to not think at all. When I mount this throne, the only thing that matters - although I plan to study business in college and pursue a career in finance - is drumming.

**Entrepreneurship at its Finest Andrew Motey**

**Briefly discuss the significance to you of the school or summer activity in which you have been most involved.**

For the last three years, a friend and I teamed up to lead Spartan Swipe, a school fundraising program that raises scholarship money for students in need. Leading this program has been very important to me. Not only does it feel great to help others achieve their dreams, but I’ve also learned many practical business skills along the way.

At the heart of the Spartan Swipe program is a discount card that we sell to consumers who use it to save money at local restaurants and businesses. The money raised from selling these cards goes towards a scholarship fund for underprivileged students at my school. At the end of our sophomore year, we learned that the leaders of the program were graduating seniors and that if there was no one to lead the program, it would be discontinued. As soon as I heard about this opportunity, I had an epiphany of sorts. If these high school students were able to implement such an effective program, so could we! My friend Eli and I then decided to take over. We were confident that if we collectively brought our skills to the table we could support these students in need.

Like most teens, Eli and I had never run a business before. However, we came up with an intricate plan to promptly get the cards on the market again. First, we called a list of local vendors, gave them our pitch, and asked them to sign contracts with us. We explained that this was a win-win-win program. The vendors benefitted from an increase in sales and number of customers. Customers won by saving money, and the Spartan Swipe program raised money by retaining 90% of the discount card sale proceeds. As my first exposure to the business world, it was quite nerve-racking to cold call new vendors. Despite being rejected by a few, we stayed adamant in our endeavor. Local restaurants, ice cream shops, barber shops, and even tuxedo retailers all expressed great interest in our proposal.

Once we agreed on the discounts with each vendor, we signed the contracts and took them to our administrative overseer, one of the vice principals at our school. The next step was to design our cards and market them. We had no idea how to design anything, so we asked a friend at USC’s Roski School of Art and Design to help us out. She came up with an enticing design– for free! In addition to making posters to promote the card, we created a fun marketing video by working with a team of filmmakers from a local program called Freestyle Academy. This school teaches art and design classes for high school students in our district. Once the video was ready, we played it during the daily school announcements. It worked! Card sales started immediately.

Once the gritty work was behind us, we were thrilled to begin collecting money from consumers and start allocating Spartan Swipe’s share to the underprivileged students.

Although I have volunteered in the community for many years, for me, there is nothing comparable to Spartan Swipe. Working successfully with businesses in my town has helped me decide to study business in college. I look forward to developing the organizational, planning, and management skills I will need to help companies be successful in the future.

Running this program with just one other person was definitely challenging. Essentially, we ran a mini business within our school. We managed everything from marketing and sales to the final fund distribution. The skills I developed from Spartan Swipe are not those that can be taught in school: Building a network, remaining organized, and staying consistent are a few of many skills I have acquired. Moreover, I had no idea how much I enjoyed collaborating with people! The most important takeaway for me is the constructive, lasting effect that just two students can make on a community.

**Failing While Baling Anonymous**

**The lessons we take from failure can be fundamental to later success. Recount an incident or time when you experienced failure. How did it affect you, and what did you learn from the experience?**

The first time I tried to bale hay was a colossal failure. I walked into the job with the naive feeling of “Oh, this will be easy” and that it would earn me some gas money. I came home my first day smelling like sweat and Alpaca dung, and so coated in mud and hay that my mother made me wait in the driveway until she could hose me off with a garden hose from a safe distance upwind. I reeked so badly that when my parents finally let me in, my sister dove into her room and shut her door, announcing, “I will not come out until you have the entire house fumigated”. Even my dog, no stranger to the smell of manure, gave me a wide berth.

Additionally, I was the most tired I have ever been - my limbs felt encased in granite. I had also been foolish enough to wear shorts, which allowed microscopic bits of hay inside my clothing. Hay rash is a topic too repulsive to describe in an admissions essay, but suffice to say, I learned my lesson. Upon emerging from the shower, my hands so raw I could barely open the door, I flopped into bed, and reflected on my day.

Despite all of the sweat and hard labor, nothing I did went right. Haybales I bound burst, spraying fifty pounds of alfalfa hay all over me and the rickety trailer I was riding on. I stacked the bales unevenly, so that they repeatedly spilled off the trailer into the field. If there’s anything worse than being covered in hay, it’s being covered in hay that has been dropped in mud and goose poop. I did this all before the eyes of Rick, the profane, obdurate farmer who had hayed this land for fifty years, who could not believe that anyone could be so utterly incompetent, and who let that be known in no uncertain terms. When I finished, and inquired whether he would need me again, he said “I’ll call you if I need you.” Since we had only finished a quarter of the field I knew he would need someone, and the knowledge that I was being replaced despite my hard work was a hard pill to swallow.

Apparently Rick was unable to find anyone else, because he called me a week later, asking if I could come back. To the surprise of everyone including myself, I accepted. I could not explain why at the time: my first time had been a disaster, and my parents thought I was nuts for wanting to go back. I eventually figured out the reason; it was my desire to earn Rick’s respect. Something about the look of disdain in his eyes when he told me that “most kids don’t come back” to hay a second time ignited a passion within me.

This was a man whose respect had to be earned through sweat and hard work - the coin of the Granite State farmer. Before I went, I made sure to wear long pants tucked into my boots to avoid hay rash, and read A Guide to Stacking Haybales on a Trailer at haytalk.com. The second time I finished baling I was still dirty and still smelled like a pigsty, but I saw a look of growing respect in his eyes and walked home standing a little taller. When I finally put hay bale number 750 in the loft, I could tell from the firmness of his handshake that I had earned his respect, and that simple fact meant the world to me.

**The Worst Mistake Anonymous**

**Tell us about something that really sparks your intellectual interest and curiosity, and compels you to explore more in the program/area of study that you indicated. It could be an idea, book, project, cultural activity, work of art, start-up, music, movie, research, innovation, question, or other pursuit.**

What was the worst mistake in US history? Could it be the Compromise of 1877? Or Vietnam? Or could it even be Columbus stepping foot on the Americas? This question has always intrigued me, and I would like to explore possible answers to this question through my studies in history. However, through endless pondering, I came to the realization that there is likely no definitive answer.

My interest in this question stemmed from reading an article by Jared Diamond called *“The Worst Mistake in the History of the Human Race”* for my AP World History class. I was immediately captivated by its content. While Diamond argued that the Agricultural Revolution was the worst mistake in world history, I came to believe that the Manchu takeover of the Ming China was a more consequential event, as it destabilized imperial China, eventually leading to its downfall, and allowing for the rise of imperialism.

My viewpoint on that question differed from one of the most influential historians of our time. I realized that the purpose of answering these questions isn’t to find a definitive answer, but to be able to articulate an argument. There is likely no single event that can be considered the worst mistake in history, but it is possible to debate what events were worse. That is why I am passionate about history: I can explore historical events through different lenses and I may come to surprising conclusions.

**Boston College Supplemental Anonymous**

**Applicants: One goal of a Jesuit education is to prepare students to serve the Common Good. Human-Centered Engineering at Boston College integrates technical knowledge, creativity, and a humanistic perspective to address societal challenges and opportunities. What societal problems are important to you and how will you use your HCE education to solve them?**

Nothing strips away the social constructs that divide us like an emergency. Having witnessed multiple people lying helplessly in need of medical treatment, I’ve been forced to acknowledge the universality of human fragility. As an EMT, my job can be harrowing as the skills I learned during my training are put to the test. Yet, as I look around the ambulance, it’s impossible to not notice the life-saving machines, from cervical collars to defibrillators, that enable my team to offer hope to the helpless. Whether they’re homeless, pregnant, young, or old, those in need can count on us to use learned skills and assistive technology to heal them.

I believe I have been called to a career in engineering; it’s a field I’ve dreamed of because of its potential to tangibly impact people in such a profoundly positive way. As a student in BC’s HCE program, I would leverage Morrissey’s courses like Human Factors in Engineering and Making the Modern World to support the Jesuit principle of Cura Personalis alongside an applied engineering curriculum. I appreciate that Morrissey’s instruction sits at the intersection of engineering and human physiology; with such focus, I’ll receive the training I need to fully understand how human-centered engineering can advance healthcare.

BC’s program is also incredibly hands-on. The Engineering Fundamentals Studio complements BC’s Collaborative Service Engineering Project, enabling me to partner with the Schiller Institute for Integrated Science and Society to tackle real-word problems impacting diverse patients around Boston. Furthermore, I would be thrilled to complete the Junior Collaborative Project Lab to position me for an array of career trajectories spanning the non-profit to private sectors.

I will also take advantage of opportunities to work closely with faculty, such as Professor Ranger. His research on medical devices and digital health technology is incredible in its potential while fascinating because of its scale. I would enjoy working with him to further his research on three-dimensional ultrasound imaging which holds immense potential for industry application. I’ve been curious to explore the integration of humans and minuscule machines that can help athletes recover, with brain functionality, and support gene therapy.

Truly a BC education in human-centered engineering is unparalleled. While my service as an EMT has offered a glimpse into the needs of diverse individuals in my community, HCE will train me to think bigger (and sometimes smaller) to grasp the potential of engineering’s impact in medical fields.