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**Sample essays 2023**

**Stanford University**

**Of Life and Basketball Blake Masters**

**Please describe your most meaningful experience to date.**

Things are not looking good for the Griffins. They have just lost the slight lead they had over their opponent and they seem extremely fatigued. To make matters worse, there are only a few minutes left in the game. My legs feel weak and tell me that they need rest, but I reply that now is not the time. I look up the court just in time to see the opposing team's power forward intercept a lazily thrown pass and he breaks for the basket. I immediately recognize that I am the only one in a position to stop him and so without thinking, I find myself blocking the charging forward's path to the basket. There is no time to think or evaluate options... I stand firm. We brace for impact - and what an impact it is! A hush falls over the gym; everyone knows that the following call could very easily determine the game's outcome. Dazed and confused, we look eagerly at the official (who seems to be thoroughly enjoying the sudden attention). CHARGE! Offensive foul! The gym erupts with emotion, and in the Griffins emerges a newfound sense of pride and energy. It proves to be just enough to carry them over a fierce Tigers team to clinch the Regional Championship.

No opportunity that I've had throughout high school has had greater meaning to me than the opportunity to play varsity basketball. I wholeheartedly believe that my basketball experience has taught me countless important lessons and has provided an excellent medium for me to grow as a person. In the future, when I look back and reminisce about my high school years, being a part of the Griffin basketball program is sure to be my most memorable and significant experience.

It would be wrong to give the impression that I only like playing basketball because of the lessons to be learned by the experience. I don't even think about such things when I am on the court. Simply put, I love playing the game and spending time with my teammates. As far as recreation goes, there is nothing that I would rather do than lace up my sneakers and play ball with a group of close friends.

Actual court time, however, is but a single part of my basketball experience. I have learned a great deal over the past three basketball seasons, but only a little of it has to do with pick-and-rolls or free-throw shooting techniques. Presented with any sort of challenge a few years ago, I would have been full of uncertainty and possibly even fear. As a sophomore starting on Varsity, however, it didn't take me long to realize that there is absolutely no room for such shyness in basketball. To be successful on the court, one must never feel intimidated or reserved. This unabashed mentality apparently manifested itself onto other aspects of my life, and the results have been very positive. I have learned not to be afraid of pursuing my goals. In order to achieve them, I know that I must pursue them boldly and with great fortitude. Now, trying something new or deviating from the normal path is not such a big deal anymore. From academics to personal matters, the lessons of determination and relentlessness that I have learned from basketball have had an immeasurable impact on my life. As Sir Winston Churchill once said, one needs to "look for the opportunity in every difficulty, as opposed to the other way around."

Playing varsity basketball has instilled in me a fierce will to achieve and embrace my ambitions as opposed to fearing them. I am extremely fortunate to have gained these qualities while playing the sport that I love. The combination of the beautiful game and my fantastic teammates has made Griffin Basketball the best experience of my life.

# To Jump Or Not To Jump Veda Tsoi

**Risk comes in many forms: intellectual, emotional, and physical. Give a risk you have taken and its impact on you.**

"Don't be such a wimp, just jump!" I glanced up to see the smirking face of a blonde riding the chairlift above me. For the past five minutes, I had sat perched atop a fifteen-foot boulder directly under Snake Creek chairlift, snowboard strapped to my feet, debating whether I could jump or not. Several times, I had slid towards the edge of what I came to call "the rock". Each peek down prompted an immediate topple backwards. Zean, my brother, sat waiting for me at the bottom of the rock. After seeing the same people passing on the chairlift more than once, he declared that he was hungry. The moment had come; I needed to decide: to jump or not to jump. I chose not to jump. I slumped down the side of the rock and followed my brother to the lodge. Disappointed by my failure, I hid my face in my mittens and refused to lift my head. Maybe I was a wimp - one of those kids who never risked anything.

I have been terrified of heights since I was a child. I would stand at the top of a single floor staircase and recoil in horror at the height. My friends would tease me about my unreasonable fear and I would laugh nervously with them as I inched away from the stairs. Taking up snowboarding defied my fear of heights. I could not snowboard if I could not ride the lift. I eased my panic of falling off the chair by seating myself on the end where I would hug the bar that rose from the bottom of the chair. As I improved in snowboarding, I challenged myself to learn new tricks at greater heights. That brought me to the rock. The idea that my feet, while firmly planted in my snowboard bindings, would be floating fifteen feet above the ground made my heart flutter.

Even with that image in my mind, I could not allow myself to be a coward. I made up my mind that the next time, I would jump. As before, Zean jumped first and sat at the bottom, expecting another long wait. I rode to the top of the rock, pausing briefly. Taking a confident breath, I slid off the edge and landed a second later in a heap at the bottom. Above me I heard exclamations of amazement from my male snowboarder counterparts. I glanced at my brother who was grinning in agreement with the cheers. Grinning in response to the cheers, I reflected on my feat. I, the girl who refused to stand atop a flight of stairs, had just jumped a fifteen-foot boulder. I had seen many people fail or refuse to jump that rock. I would do it three more times that day, stopping only when the resort closed.

Even though I jumped the rock, I still have a fear of heights. The difference between me before and after the rock is that I no longer feel confined by my fear. I now look forward to confronting and conquering other "rocks", and most other challenges that come my way.

# My Genuine Success Anisha Patel

## As you reflect on your life thus far, what has someone said, written or expressed in some fashion that is especially meaningful to you?

I shuddered. Chills raced down my spine. My arms and legs were suddenly covered in goose bumps. I read the quote once again. âTo leave the world a little better; whether by a healthy child, a garden patch, or a redeemed social condition; to know even one life has breathed easier because you have lived. This is the meaning of success.â? The intensity of Emerson's quote resounded in my head over and over again. It was eerily familiar, as if said to encompass my core values. Immediately, my mind raced back to the time my values began to form, my childhood in India.

Images of helpless desperation and utter hopelessness flooded my mind. Lepers with severed limbs wheeling around in makeshift wooden carts in desperation for some mobility; a small, poverty-stricken, malnourished child, afflicted with jaundice and clothed in a potato sack; abandoned children, limping and vomiting, unaware of the polio viruses multiplying in their bodies, eventually causing paralysis. And to think, all of these epidemics remain prevalent because of the lack of basic and inexpensive medical care. I knew deep inside, even then, that my success depended on making a commitment to ameliorate those lives. But how was I going to undertake such a daunting task? I began to look at my grandfatherâs life as a model of my own.

My grandfather initially triggered my sense of responsibility through his work, and served as a constant reminder to me of my moral obligation to serve the destitute. He, more so than I, grew up in a village watching Indiaâs most impoverished people suffer needlessly. He knew that he had a duty to improve the lives of these people, and through education he could live out his lifeâs purpose. As a result, he became the first in my family to leave the village, receive a college education and become a medical doctor. He spent the rest of his life providing free medical care, food, clothing, and shelter to indigent people. Watching my grandfather dedicate his life to service and charity inspired me to make it my responsibility to do the same.

Coming to the United States afforded me the opportunity to continue my grandfather's legacy on a grander scale. Being in this land of great opportunity, I was aware that I would have to work very hard to utilize the resources given to me, such as the potential for a strong postsecondary education. However, when I entered high school, the intense competition inherent in a typical high school environment clouded my purpose and caused me to lose sight of the big picture, the engraved images from my childhood. I became preoccupied with becoming the top student in my class by focusing on grades and activities so that I could boast on my college applications. It was at this point that Emerson's quote abruptly reminded me of the true purpose and motivation for my education. It permanently instilled in me the belief that what truly matters in my life is using my education for the purpose of uplifting those who are deprived of basic necessities, the same belief that my grandfather based his life on.

As a child, I was a passive observer of indigence and social injustices. As an educated adult, I choose to take an active role and involve myself on a personal level in the lives of the destitute, which will allow me to attain the success Emerson profoundly speaks of. Pursuing my education at Stanford University will allow me to attain the strong postsecondary education I have been seeking and afford me the opportunity to undertake the enormous task of helping to alleviate some of the suffering I witnessed in my childhood. Using my education, I hope to provide for those underserved victims the inexpensive yet necessary medical treatment, just like my grandfather. And if I ever lose sight of that big picture again, I can rely on Emersonâs words to keep me firmly rooted to my purpose of achieving this genuine form of success.

# Calculus Veda Tsoi

## Give an idea or experience that you find intellectually exciting.

"Pre-calculus is much harder then calculus, and if you can make it through pre-calculus, you will breeze through calculus." This is my math teacher, Mrs. Croft's, favorite statement. Until I took calculus, I never believed her. I walked into calculus class the following year expecting grueling homework and concepts that I would never be able to grasp. Instead, I found the only math that made sense to me, both in its concepts and its applications. I learned at the beginning of the year that I did not have to immediately understand every idea presented to me. As I mastered other concepts, I saw that each new chapter built on the last one, and by doing problems in the following chapters, I would eventually learn the concepts that I had not yet fully grasped. Calculus not only appealed to me because I understood it, but also because it has many applications. I learned how to find fluid pressure exerted on a dam, and I learned how to find the pressure milk exerts on the side of a milk carton. I found how to determine a particle's velocity from its position as a function of time, and I could determine my shadow's velocity as the position of the sun changes. I learned how to calculate the rate of production and growth of a company and how it related to changes in revenue and cost over a given time period. The numerous applications of calculus have made me appreciate, and like, this universal math.

# Meaningful Activity: Violin Veda Tsoi

## Give a meaningful activity

I love to play the violin, but I hate to practice it. I dislike what I consider to be the mundane but difficult process of going over each passage or line individually, trying to make each note perfect while still developing the piece as a whole. Once I have learned my piece, however, my work is rewarded as I become comfortable with the music I once struggled to learn and perfect. The notes flow out of my fingers, without thought, almost without effort. They become my voice, and I sing out of my delicate wood instrument. I not only love the music that I produce through my violin, but I also love my violin itself. My violin represents memories. It reflects the pacts my brother and I formed promising each other that we would not tell mom that neither of us practiced that day. It symbolizes my violin performance group in Chicago as we receive a standing ovation from seven hundred music teachers from around the country. Violin has been an integral part of my life since I began playing at age three. The music I produce with my violin echoes my life, changing as I change and maturing as I grow. My frustration, sorrow, felicity, ennui, and humor can all be heard as I play. Truly, my violin has become an extension of me.

# Purpose of Education Anh Pham

## Choose your own topic

Nothing better epitomizes today's motto of learning than Aristotle's analysis of education, "The roots of education are bitter, but the fruit is sweet." It seems that the fruits of education have bloomed even greater and sweeter than ever before. The fruits are the incentives behind the ever-increasing literacy rates, and the temptations and lusts of the young population who is graduating more and more from college. Yet, in this tide of progressivism and in these spirits of intellectuality, who actually stops and wonders why he obsessively seeks a good education? And then, what is the real purpose of a prime education?

The most obvious answer inculcated in the minds of any respondent to these questions would be the predictable and hackneyed maxim of "Knowledge is power". With professions of doctors, lawyers, and any other vocations well-advertised in their propitious incomes, there is a clear protocol that all of the disciples must follow: the First Commandment, study hard, Second Commandment, do well on the SAT, Third Commandment enter top college, and finally, bear the sweetest fruits or rewards of education, money.

Personally, I am not willing to invest a lifetime into education if the ultimate reward is money. Money cannot be the fruits of my education, and, most importantly, the prime goal of my life; I believe in a higher purpose of education, a good education.

Now entering my senior year of high school, I have begun to understand the purpose of my education. Yes, as a consequence of a high-quality education, I will accrue some fiscal security in life. However, the purpose of my education, I know, is the satiation of my own relentless competitiveness and personal vindictiveness. As for the former, competitiveness constantly impels me to learn more and know more. I am constantly in motion, in mind and body, to improve to be the best in any fields of competition, whether intellectually or athletically. The minute I stop progressing intellectually, I feel as if I am already a thousand miles behind the increasingly savvy world. Hence, an intangible force constantly irks me to keep up with the best minds of my age. The latter goal of my education is the compensation for all that my parents had given up for the education of their children. I am indignant at circumstances that had left them with little options but to trade their prestige and wealth as doctors in their country for a much more humble emigrating life of financial insecurities and emotional distresses, all intended for a better education for their children. I cannot bear to see my mom serving for anybody and scrambling to save every penny, for she once was a well-respected doctor whom the maternal side of the entire community looked for guidance. I cannot bear to watch my dad dragging home day after day, trying to suppress his much damaged pride so his children wouldn't see his suffering. Nights go by and early mornings come, I would stumble upon clandestine conversations of my parents, in which my dad poured his heart out expressing his grief, for the barrier of language has forsaken him from his beloved profession. Though my dad is a doctor, everyday he struggles to climb over that language barrier, trying to fight against the tides of stereotypes, trying to earn the respect of his colleagues who continually belittle him for his lack of "Americanism", and trying, with all his age and the grays on his head, to earn a living. I can't hold back the anger and the tears when I think that the man, once so well-admired and revered in half a county for his dedication to his patients and his ingenuity in cardiology, has now been reduced to a mere supplicant of some novice doctor whom the man has the age and experience to be his superior scholar. And this is why I must pursue education with all that I feel, all that I know, and all that I can give. The fruits of my education will not be the gratification of wealth, but of the compensation of what my parents had lost: prestige, pride, and future.

For these very purposes of education, it is absolutely essential that I receive the best education in the country. Only then would I be able to satisfy my competitiveness and ameliorate the irreparable payment I am forever indebted to my bearers. If the purpose of education is one of only temporal satisfaction, then any quality education would suffice. But if the purpose of education is to heal and bandage the wounds of the past and the humilities of life, then I am willing to fully dedicate my entire life to that goal of education.

# Crystallization Michael Jin

## Sharing intellectual interests is an important aspect of university life. Describe an experience, literary work, class, project or idea that you find intellectually exciting, and explain why.

The hum of the centrifuge sharpened to an insistent whine, clicking softly as the safety lock disengaged. I collected my vial and reached for the pipette -- that sixth extension of my hand. My fingers shook slightly, but I was careful not to drop the vial, for it contained precursor B cell receptor proteins in a concentration high enough to crystallize -- my goal for the past month. Ever since my sixth birthday, when I read Cell Wars, a picture book on the immune system, I had wanted this moment of fruition and anticipation. I felt as if I were on the verge of entering the mid-game in chess. And in a sense, research feels much like that pastime. The first moves are procedural -- everyone must move out the pawns and knights. From there, it gets interesting. My work requires the same combination of intuition and analysis as chess does -- to probe the many possibilities not for the best moves, but for the optimum crystallization conditions. I must always think a couple steps ahead and compare each experimental result to my overarching hypothesis. And I do have an opponent -- time. It took a few weeks before I was able to look through the Leica microscope and see baby crystals. They were not pretty rubies or sapphires, but they represented a beautiful checkmate.

# Meaning of Running Michael Jin

## Of the activities, interests and experiences listed on the previous page, which is the most meaningful to you, and why?

The dust billowed down, coating my face and the inside of my lungs as I ran. Ahead, Heartbreak Hill seemed to stretch into blue infinity. My senses deadened by fatigue, I almost missed hearing the voices. They grew louder and louder and suddenly I could distinguish my name -- my friends were cheering me on. I wasn't alone. My feet lifted, my back straightened and then I was soaring. My first cross-country race showed me half of an essential truth: a confident spirit promotes strong running. But it was only recently that I grasped the second half: confident running promotes a strong spirit -- I run, therefore I am. Each day that I come home after school to run an hour and take a cold shower afterwards, I am expressing both my academic and personal values. The same courage that let me overcome my fatigue in that first race allows me to finish a gauntlet of physics problems followed by a marathon reading session of Thomas Hardy. The same defiant drive that pushed me up Heartbreak Hill propels me through daily life. Some educators say that kindergarten teaches all the essential life lessons. Running is good review.

# Bryan Michael Jin

## Jot a note to your future roommate relating a personal experience that reveals something about you.

Hey roomy, come to the local chili festival this weekend! I had a blast there two summers ago -- and not only as a chili aficionado. Let me explain. I was a Palo Alto Fire Explorer in high school, so during the summer I staffed first aid stations at Bay Area festivals and triathlons. Well, that Saturday morning two years ago was quiet as usual -- a few Band-Aid cases and requests for sunscreen. But around noon, the emergency radio started squawking. Dispatch told me to respond to an unknown medical emergency at a nearby field. I didn't know what to think, but I grabbed my trauma bag and jogged out. I soon reached the wet grass and saw my medical supervisor questioning someone -- probably a relative. Then I saw the patient: a Hispanic boy of about ten years, kneeling on the grass. It turned out his name was Bryan -- which incidentally is the name of my brother's best friend, too. Apparently, the Bryan in front of me had broken his right clavicle while playing some sport. I asked a fellow emergency responder to grab me a splint. By the time we finished treating the injury, the ambulance technicians had arrived. "Don't worry, Bryan, you'll be fine," I told him. I squeezed his hand as he was lifted onto the stretcher. He looked at me dubiously at first, but as he was carried into the ambulance, he smiled briefly at me. I waved to my patient -- no, he was not just my patient. He was Bryan.

# The Perfect Time for the Perfect Quote Anonymous

## As you reflect on your life thus far, what has someone said, written, or expressed in some fashion that is especially meaningful to you?

Quotes are like songs and musical tunes. You can remember and repeat only the really good ones. For some reason, they stay in your head and play over and over again after you have found the perfect one. Like songs, quotes can be stuck in different places of your life. Each one has a significant meaning that relates to certain areas of your experience. Some people find quotes of inspiration from songs or books. Others come across them in the Bible. Some find them on those handy internet sites. Others discover them in a fortune cookie. But for me, I found the perfect quote sitting on a bench in the Library of Congress in Washington D.C. after a long but very interesting tour during my summer family vacation. This quote continues to stay with me and intrigue me with its abstract but significant meaning.

Since I was in the largest library in the world, the Library of Congress seemed like the perfect place to find a quote within its multitude of books. However, I did not find my favorite saying in a book in the library; I found it on a wall. After a long day of touring, I plopped tiredly onto a bench and stared into space. In my boredom, my eyes began playing tricks on me. They gravitated towards one of the many quotes that fill and beautifully decorate the library's walls. It read, "WORDS ARE ALSO ACTIONS AND ACTIONS ARE A KIND OF WORDS." I read the quote, read it again, and read it again several times after that. Something in my head was tugging at me to fully understand that quote, so I contemplated it for a while and then forgot about it. When I returned home from vacation, I kept remembering that specific quotation over and over again; it was like a song had gotten stuck in my head and it kept repeating the same line. Never before had something someone wrote or said ever affected me in this way. My curiosity pushed me to email a librarian at the Library of Congress and discover my line was written by the great Transcendentalist, Ralph Waldo Emerson, in his work "The Poet." I had solved the mystery to my quote. It was now just a matter of deciphering it to determine its true meaning in my life.

When I first saw this quote in the library, I immediately thought that it sounded really familiar. Emerson's words reminded me of the colloquial saying, "Actions speak louder than words." I saw my quote as a response to that proverb that I had grown up with all my life. When Emerson says "Words are also actions," I immediately felt that all words and actions were at the same level. A person's words and the actions that accompany them go hand in hand. I realize that in my life, this quote applies to many of my views towards hypocrites and "fake" people. When I hear a person say one thing and do the opposite later, I become frustrated because they are being untrue to themselves and untrue to others. It would be nice if people truly knew their beliefs and acted on those beliefs. I used to believe that to be "cool" or "popular" I had to conform to other's expectations. Just to fit in, I would say the slang, dress the part, and have the attitude. However, I knew I was not being true to myself. I soon realized I was being caught in my lies, and in reevaluating myself, I found a group of friends who allowed me to show my true colors and be myself. To this day, I am still friends with these people and know I will continue these friendships throughout my life. I do not have to act, pretend, or lie around them. Emerson's quote has inspired me to stick to my beliefs and personality because my words are also an example of my actions. What I say I am and what I do go hand in hand to create my unique self.

The second part of the quote, "Actions are a kind of words," fuses the human self with his or her words. Some people cannot communicate as well as others, which can create a barrier for understanding, but their actions mean everything to them and to you. When I worked at the Torrance city transit office, I often sold passes to mentally disabled children and adults. One day, a disabled teenager around my age came to the counter and requested a special bus pass. He had a very hard time speaking and articulating his words; after many efforts, I still could not understand him. I felt horrible because I wanted to help him and not further his embarrassing situation. I felt useless and wanted badly to help him. Finally, in my frustration, he gave me a huge smile, took out his wallet, and showed me exactly what I needed to give him. His smile conveyed everything he could not say in words; his understanding told me, "Everything is okay, thank you, and you're welcome" all in one. Looking back, this one act of patience and overall goodness touched my heart in a way that I shall remember forever. Through that experience, his actions also put into words his whole life situation, marked by helplessness and misunderstanding. I later found out he had been in the middle of a gang shooting and was shot in the head. I became even more sympathetic to his situation and more appreciative of his actions towards me. Meeting him has furthered my interest in pediatric mental and physical disabilities. With this quote, I have learned to look past a person's outward appearance and look inward towards the true source or motive for their actions. You cannot judge a person by his or her words or appearance. Actions can be small and insignificant or large and lofty, but they tell something about a person's character. In certain situations, words can be the best actions, but in other instances, actions can be enough to understand a person's entire life.

I can still remember that moment in the Library of Congress. From my experience, quotes can inspire actions and promote words. My action that day was to squint at the wall to read the quote, and my verbal response was "Wow, that is deep," not even knowing how deep that influence would be on my life. I can remember the feelings of that day. The picture of the quote on the wall is a little fuzzy now, but the saying and its significance in my life will never fade.

# Daddy's Little Girl Sally Chang

## "A picture is worth a thousand words" as the adage goes. (You're limited to the space provided, however.) Attach a photograph (either online or hard copy with the paper application no larger than 5 x 7 inches) that represents something important to you, and explain its significance.

I used to be "Daddy's little girl." Because I dropped into the world in between my genius, future-Nobel-prize-winner sister and my attention-needy baby brother, my mom never had enough time in between attending math competitions on the weekends and juggling baby bottles at four in the morning. Thus, every morning, my dad was the one who stirred up Campbell's chicken noodle soup for breakfast and nudged me awake to watch Mr. Roger's Neighborhood.

I always begged my mom to let me tag along with my dad, and he loved taking me along with him on his errands. Sometimes I helped him pick out watermelons - he rapped the sides of each melon and we decided together if the sound was "just right." On lazy Saturday afternoons, I sat in the passenger seat, rubbing the dark crimson velvet with both hands, as we drove off to wash the car or check out a stack of books from the library.

My dad competed every year in the high jump competition at De Anza College. The night before, I always stayed up to decorate posters which screamed, "Go Daddy, go!" One year, he brought home the gold medal, which I fingered lovingly. When he noticed my awestruck eyes, he leaned down and pressed the medal into my palms. "Take care of this for me, okay?" he grinned.

On my first day of kindergarten, my dad fumbled my hair into a messy ponytail before we drove to school. When my new teacher pushed open the door, my dad tried to say good-bye, but I refused to let go of his hand. "Stay with me, Daddy, please?" I begged. He smiled and shook his head as my teacher coaxed me into the bright classroom. From the door, I watched my dad linger at the curb before he drove off, a cloud of smoke trailing behind his old red Chrysler. Hot tears welled up in my eyes, and my soft sniffles flooded into grief-stricken sobs. Even though Mrs. Belong tried to reassure me, the tears kept coming - I hadn't realized that I had to go to school without my dad.

Yet something changed as I started to grow up. In elementary school, I never understood why I was so different from everyone else. When I was invited to birthday parties or to explore the creek, my dad never allowed me to go. I could never invite my best friends to our house and I was forced to wear knee-high socks, even in June. Consequently, I stopped understanding what my dad had to say; instead, I informed him curtly that he was wrong. I blamed all my problems on the one person that seemed furthest from being a friend: my father.

As the years ticked by, he stopped asking if I wanted him to tie my hair into a ponytail. We talked less and less, and I never wanted to go anywhere with him. Instead, I chatted incessantly on the phone with my friends, started wearing bell-bottoms, and experimented with black eyeliner. He hated that I was changing; I hated that he didn't understand me. I felt like I could never live up to his expectations and nothing I accomplished would ever be good enough. At first, I responded to his criticism with an indignant comeback. As time passed, I found it easier to just not respond at all. Eventually, communication dwindled down to the bare minimum. I justified his aloof personality by brushing him off as nothing more than an irascible man.

In the past few years, we have both changed for the better and our views have finally aligned. I have realized that all along, my dad was not trying to criticize who I was becoming. Instead, he just missed his little girl. He is now grayer and wiser, and I am more independent and intuitive than I used to be. Nevertheless, things have not changed all that much. I still tag along with him, except now we spend Saturday afternoons at Starbucks Coffee, where I peruse biology outlines and where he leafs through a Chinese newspaper. In many ways, I am still his little girl. I am the girl who he helps with the hardest set of calculus problems and who always needs rides to the bookstore. Because he is a man of few words, I am his friend who understands the significance of what he does not say, rather than just what he does say. I am his daughter who loves him and respects his decisions, not because I need to, but because I want to do so.

I see parts of myself reflected in my father. He has passed to me not just his blood type and his cheekbones, but also the belief that I can get anywhere and do anything as long as I work hard and believe in my success. Only in the past few years have I started to understand that he has always been proud of who I am. He has taught me that I need to move on in life, no matter what may be holding me back. Most importantly, I have learned to accept the imperfections in him, as well as other people, because he embraces and cherishes the imperfections in me.

I never realized how old he was until he hurt himself competing in the high jump competition last year. By this time next year, he will be fifty-four years old. After that, I don't know how much longer we will have with each other. All I know is that my dad will continue to be who he has always been: my father, my hero, and my best friend.

# My Grandparents Nabill Idrisi

## "A picture is worth a thousand words" as the adage goes. (You're limited to the space provided, however.) Attach a photograph (either online or hard copy with the paper application, no larger than 5 x 7 inches) that represents something important to you, and explain its significance.

It is the usual hot, sticky day in the streets of Dhaka. You look in any direction, and you see people bustling about with business, family, or other important matters. I was in one of the seemingly endless number of rickshaws next to my grandmother - my Dadi. We had just finished picking out some sweets from the store to take home.

"Dadu, what do you want to be when you grow up? A doctor, an architect, an engineer, perhaps?" She asked me while our bodies jolted in the bumpy rickshaw ride.

"I'm not sure, Dadi. Everyone wants me to become a doctor, but I don't think I'd be truly happy as one." After a brief pause, I add, "but I think engineering would be nice."

"Well, Dadu, whatever you do, just put yourself into it totally, and you'll be successful. I know you will," she replied with a cute smile. I loved my Dadi.

As we entered my grandparents' house situated comfortably in Dhanmondi, I saw Dada with his reading glasses on, sitting at the table reading The Daily Ittefaq.

"Nabill, can you believe what is going on in your country? After September 11, American foreign policy has turned for the worse. And Bush isn't helping any." I sip my mango juice and nod my head in agreement, not sure of what to say.

My grandfather is a highly respected man and well known throughout Bangladesh. His life amazes me, for everything he did he followed with a passion. He studied at the University of Calcutta, and traveled throughout various Middle Eastern countries, keeping a sketchbook of unique works of architecture. Later in his life, he taught Art and Architecture at Harvard while he lived in America for a few years. Also, he has an amazing library, a place where I often browse for books on Islam and world issues.

"What's your favorite subject, Nabill?" he questions me.

"Probably math," I reply earnestly.

"Ahh - maths is a beautiful topic, especially when you involve philosophy. There's a certain point to where all philosophy involves mathematics, and they're both complementary to progress in understanding," he responds with an air of fascination. Indeed, it intrigued me as well.

It was especially during those summer days as this one during my visit to Bangladesh that I experienced a degree of understanding I hadn't previously achieved. The knowledge I gained there was, in a sense, much more valuable than that gained from my years of schooling. I understood more fully where I came from, where my parents came from, and how these people so close to me viewed the world from the other side of the globe. This picture of my grandparents and me was taken in my last few days in Bangladesh. It is significant because what I learned from these two people I have kept with me and applied to my own life. This was the last time that I would be able to see them, but my life has only become richer with everything that I have gained from these amazing people that beautiful summer in Bangladesh.

# Father and Son Anonymous

## As you reflect on your life thus far, what has someone said, written or expressed in some fashion that is especially meaningful to you? Why?

This past year has been replete with indelible memories for me; there have been moments that have temporarily frozen my consciousness, and times that have called for deep introspection, all stemming from my father's unexpected battle with a malignant brain tumor. As the youngest in my family, I have never faced the burden of aging grandparents or relatives of any kind, for the elder members of my family had already passed away before I was cognizant of their deaths. I feel immensely fortunate that my life thus far has been free from marked adversity. The sensation of helplessness that accompanies incurable disease and the unprecedented awareness of time passing too quickly were, until recently, altogether novel feelings for me. Once I first heard of his diagnosis, I internally separated my father from all quotidian endeavors. The late nights at the hospital, the painful attempts to communicate with an unresponsive man, and the chills that ran up my spine every time the phone rang, were all surreal, and seemed to be part of someone else's experience. In this manner, it was naturally easy for me to carry on with my normal life at school, for my dad was simply away on business, I told myself, and would return one day as the vibrant father I had always known. Only recently have I abandoned this foolish method of coping.

Days and even moments before my dad's palliative brain surgery, I was immobilized by my own trepidation, a sensation that led to unnecessary awkwardness between us and thwarted all meaningful communication. Stuck in this sphere of inaction, I waited alone in the corner of the hospital, unwilling to let my dad go under the knife and anesthesia without speaking to him, potentially for the last time. I approached his stretcher, and before I could put my feelings to words, my dad said to me, in the raspy voice of a sick man, "I love you, and I'm so proud of you, Cam." The immediate impact of those first three, often hackneyed, words was profound, simply because I could not remember that last time I had heard those words from my father. My dad expresses his love with an infectious smile or a tickling shoulder rub or a lesson on how to fix a stubborn lawn mower. I never knew him to verbalize his emotions; under the circumstances, his endearment was doubly reassuring.

Despite repeated medical complications, my father has made great strides in his convalescence, although he is frequently dazed and seems unaware of his proximity to death. While he will continue chemotherapy until the tumor takes his life, he is lucid enough to remind me to do my homework and clean my room. The two of us have come to a mutual agreement as his time to dote on me fades away; he will do his best to impart to me whatever he feels important, if I promise to take the time to listen, not just nod my head as my ears perfunctorily take in his endless admonitions, but to sincerely listen and absorb what he is really saying. As a result, the last few months have been marked by the reenactments of things that my dad has always enjoyed saying with conviction: "Enunciate! No one will understand you if you don't speak clearly!" and "Be productive!" and new to the list, "Drive slowly!" Yet the fact is that his reminders are seemingly pointless, for I am already made in the mold of my father. Like him, I would rather paint a house than dally at the beach. We share the qualities of a perfectionist, an obsession with getting things done, and a proclivity to conspicuously voice our opinions.

I have been blessed to be reminded of the cyclical nature of family relationships, for, inevitably, it is the children who tend to their parents after years of being tended to. As much as I try to avoid this daunting responsibility on a daily basis, I am comforted and inspired by the steadfastness with which my dad faces his uphill battle. Before, I managed this burden by not dealing with it; now, encouraged by his candid words, I deal with this challenge directly, and that has made all the difference in our relationship and my wellbeing.

# The Burden of Privilege John Dryden

## As you reflect on your life thus far,what has someone said, written or expressed in some fashion that is especially meaningful to you? Why?

You can use your enormous privilege and opportunity to seek purely private pleasure and gain. But history will judge you, and ultimately, you will judge yourself, on the extent to which you have used your gifts to enlighten and enrich the lives of your neighbors.

Robert F. Kennedy spoke these words to a group of university students in 1966. The wisdom of these words has touched me more profoundly than anything else I have ever read, heard, or seen. When I first saw this quote, I did not pay much attention to it. The quotation was printed on the front of a brochure for a summer program called the Civic Leadership Institute (CLI). I stumbled upon it as I was searching for a productive way to spend my summer. When I read it for a second time, I saw that the statement was much more than a simple catchphrase. The quote on the pamphlet's cover influenced my decision to attend the course. Those three weeks turned out to be one of the most incredible experiences of my life, which is why this quotation was - and still is - incredibly meaningful to me.

When I read this quote, I was struggling to accept the disparities between the different social echelons that exist in our own nation. It was impossible for me to accept the fact that the circumstances a person is born into could be so instrumental in determining that person's future and "success." The Attorney General's words told me to use my assets to help support those less fortunate than me, rather than spend my life lamenting the unfair advantages I have over others. It placated my frustration by suggesting that, as long as I dedicate myself to "enriching the lives of" those less fortunate than me, I may rest comfortably at my position in the social hierarchy. This reassured me and laid the foundation for a "plan of action" to effect changes in my society.

This quote impacts me most profoundly when I think about the path it compelled me to follow. Because the quotation inspired me so, it was one of the reasons that I decided to attend CLI this past summer. I have already provided quite a bit of information on this subject, and I will try not to be unnecessarily repetitive. At CLI, I developed an interest in political and civic issues. Visiting the local chapter of the American Civil Liberties Union was particularly interesting to me. Although they spoke mostly about the death penalty, I was intrigued by the concept of an organization that stands up for groups with few or no rights. Currently, I am considering a career in politics so that I may be an advocate for some of the causes that I believe are so grossly underrepresented in our nation. The quote's role in prodding me towards attending what would be one of the most influential experiences of my life makes it much more meaningful for me.

The truth behind these words that Robert F. Kennedy spoke resonates in today's world, where so many people are concerned with "getting ahead" in life that they neglect their fellow citizens. No matter how much money these people make, however, they will never know true success until they are able to overcome their selfish nature. I know it will be hard, but I look forward to resting easy when I am old, knowing that I did everything I could to improve the lives of those around me.

# A Contemporary Martyr Ellen Cassidy

## As you reflect on your life thus far, what has someone said, written or expressed in some fashion that is especially meaningful to you? Why?

"If a bullet should enter my brain, let that bullet destroy every closet door." Harvey Milk

I am a martyr. I am passionate. I recognize the fact that I mean so little, but can do so much. I came across this quote in June of this year, and it brought tears to my eyes because I could see myself in it. I, like Harvey Milk, have a great story to tell. My story didn't end with two bullets in the head in San Francisco's city hall; in fact, it hasn't ended at all. I live every day for a reason, a reason I gave up everything for.

During my junior year of high school, I wore a rainbow scarf to school everyday. It functioned partially to warm me during passage between buildings on campus, but it was also my "gay pride flag" as my friends called it. Everyone at Notre Dame, my former school, knew I was out and proud, and I was beloved by my peers and teachers not in spite of it, but because of it. Notre Dame was a loving and nurturing environment in the de facto sense, but it was about as resistant to de jure change as any institution on the planet. I started a Tolerance Forum, a discussion group devoted to addressing issues of social and political tolerance, but the club was never mine, it was a method of subduing a dangerous force. I was frustrated with the lack of change I, a slight girl of 16, had instituted. So when prom time rolled around, and the administration disallowed two girls from attending together, I knew I had to do something.

I started the Second Prom. I envisioned it as an off-campus event, completely chaperoned, but with a more accepting atmosphere. At my prom anyone could go with anyone they wanted. My classmates were enthralled by the idea, and I was excited that I could finally take a stand without the Catholic red tape holding me back. I was soon confronted by the administration. They told me that I couldn't talk about the prom on school grounds. My political radar went into overdrive. I can't talk about something? Is this 1984? No, it's just Catholic school. In spite of their obstacles, I sold over 100 tickets, raised $2,000, booked a beautiful Tudor-style hall, hired a band, and commissioned a caterer. The Second Prom was my life for 6 weeks. I lived it, breathed it, ate it, slept it, and dreamed it. I never thought I could care about something so much. I often questioned myself and my close friends, "Why am I doing this? This is just a stupid dance!" It was never just a dance for me. I would never give up my whole life for a bunch of teenagers to dance to Nelly. I knew what I was doing was important so I issued a press release. The day before the prom KYW News Radio, Philadelphia's local CBS radio affiliate, called Notre Dame for comment. I was pulled out of Physics class, and sent to Sr. Mary Anne, the school president's, office. Notre Dame's top five administrators were there waiting for me. Their eyes radiated a sorrowful anger, some of them hated me, some just felt sorry for me. They told me I was a disgrace, and I got out of there as fast as I could. I kept it together in that room, but the moment I shut the door behind me my facade fell apart. I ran out to my bus and just whispered to myself, "Get me out of here; I can't be here right now." The next day I was on KYW every 20 minutes, and it felt good to know I did have some people behind me. The prom went off without a hitch. It was great to know I made something so big happen all by myself. It was my baby, and seeing it through to fruition was the best and most important thing I've ever done. I went to sleep that Saturday night knowing that I had accomplished something that mattered, I brought a girl to my prom.

I didn't go to school on Monday. My dad met with school administrators, and they "had conditions for my return." They were offended by my constant disregard for the moral nature of their campus. "Always walking around with that rainbow scarf, even in May. She has no respect." They were right. I never took that scarf off - it wasn't just a scarf.

On June 1, 2004 my father received a letter saying that I was not welcome back at Notre Dame for my senior year. He told me about a week later, after finals and the SATs. I didn't cry for a few days. I was mostly stunned that I actually couldn't finish high school at the place I'd called my home for the past three years. I didn't tell anyone since we were consulting a lawyer, but they called a town meeting of alumni, parents and faculty to tell everyone that the "problem had been removed." Their heretic had been burned at the stake. It was at this time that I came across Harvey's quote. Something clicked inside me, and I knew that everything was worth it. If just one closeted meek and mild teenager hears my story, and gets the courage to be honest and proud of who they are, my life and my sacrifice was worth it ten times over. I gave up everything for something, and that something matters more than all my everythings. Harvey spoke to me from the dead, and enlisted, not a radical, but a martyr.

# You Must Know That I Love You Jennifer Romanek

## As you reflect on your life thus far, what has someone said, written, or expressed in some fashion that is especially meaninful to you? Why?

As we all piled onto the aging tweed sofa, my dad struggled to get the fancy new VCR to work while my mom, my brother Jacob, and I continued to stare vacantly at the blank screen. It was Christmas Eve, 2001, and we were settling in to watch a dusty, recently rediscovered home video. The film opened unceremoniously, depicting a common scene among siblings: a young girl, jumping up and down, was desperately attempting to attract the attention of her disinterested older brother. The group laughed. After all, Jacob and I had long since forgotten about that difficult early period; we were good buddies now, and had been for well over a year, ever since I completed the seventh grade. As the video progressed, however, it grew increasingly darker and more uncomfortable. The next scene revealed him viciously propelling my six-year old feather weight frame down the stairs. Then, he stoops, picks up a shoe box, and throws it at me - hard. On film, we see my mother rush to rescue me, all the while chastising Jacob as her daughter resiliently picks herself off the floor, in spite of a bleeding knee. In real time, I note mom and dad shifting nervously on the coach, working hard to conceal their deep frowns. I wonder, "Should I laugh?" Unexpectedly, the video is interrupted by a loud command: "Stop it, guys!" It was Jacob, sounding angry, raw, and exposed. I felt a shiver down my spine as I watched his hazel eyes brim with tears. I will never forget what he said, or how he turned to me. "Jenni," he whispered hoarsely, in a slow cadence markedly different from his typical hyperactive tempo, "I am so, so sorry for ever hurting you. You must know that I love you."

When he was in the first grade, my brother Jacob was diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). He spent his childhood years bouncing off the walls, irritable, bored, and depressed. He was pushed to do well in school, yet, despite being extremely bright, his efforts to learn to read were repeatedly frustrated. Further testing ultimately revealed that he was also suffering from learning disabilities - severe dyslexia, dysgraphia, and motor-sequencing disorder - that adversely affected the important cognitive skills necessary for spelling, phonetically sounding-out words, and blending sounds. Up until I was in eighth grade, Jacob was hostile, aggressive, and manipulative. While some of those behaviors may not be unusual among siblings, unlike all of my friend's older brothers, Jake didn't stop with hair pulling. Somehow, though, I always knew that we were still the best of friends. I still remember how, each and every day, I would arrive at home from school half an hour before he did. I took care to set out a snack so that we could get to work immediately on his homework. My favorite was the reading comprehension workbook, filled with stories about the perfect life: bicycles and trips to the zoo, summer thunderstorms and lazy Sundays, gooey chocolate chip cookies and duck-filled lakes. As Jacob danced wildly around the room, I would read aloud, impersonating each character with exaggerated voices and silly gesticulations; sometimes, I even dressed the part, secretly appropriating my mother's outrageous antique hats. Looking through old family photo albums, it is striking how many snapshots reveal the repeated image of me flailing my arms, attempting to form a hug around Jacob's tensed neck. The disquieting dichotomy in the pictures is revealed in terms of the contrast between Jacob's trademark grimace of antagonism, juxtaposed beside my sad but beaming smile. Though I loved my brother more than anything else in the entire world, at the same time, our relationship pained me so much that I could count on the taste of salty tears to usher me to sleep each night, anxious that he didn't quite love me back.

Even today, I remember that December 24th as though it were yesterday. Although Jacob and I shared everything from math problems to crush crises, prior to that night, he had never, with any trace of sincerity, told me that he loved me. When he first said it, my family's incessant chatter came to a dead halt. My dad paused the tape, creating a tangible silence that screamed in my ears. Was this a dream? A warm tear of joy insisted that it was real. Since that time, Jacob has never repeated those three words to me; it's still not something he's entirely comfortable with, and I accept that. But I can reflect on and appreciate not only the sense of tranquility that comes with knowing my feelings are reciprocated, but also, I can better understand the intensity of Jacob's internal struggle. Who would have guessed that three small syllables could be wrought with such significance?

# Sharing Success at Manitou High Nathan Foorman

## "A picture is worth a thousand words." Attach a picture of something important to you and explain its significance.

A successful movie producer named Samuel Goldwyn once said, "Luck is the sense to recognize an opportunity and the ability to take advantage of it." As I read this quote recently in a magazine article, I immediately thought of the Manitou Springs High School Key Club and my role in its beginnings over the past year. It reminded me of how fortunate I feel to be a part of something truly worthwhile, and as I look back on the events leading up to today, I do feel that a certain amount of this "luck" has gone into making my goals for the program a reality. The picture that I have chosen and sent was taken last month on September 15th, the night of the Key Club's Inaugural Chartering Ceremony. That evening, a major part of the community gathered at the city hall to celebrate the establishment of our program as a permanent institution at the high school. Parents, teachers, school administrators, city officials, and many other community leaders watched as the club's first members were instated and recognized. To conclude the night's program, I had the honor of accepting the charter from our sponsoring Kiwanis Club and found myself surrounded by many of my closest friends for the picture that you have today (By the way, I'm the devilishly handsome one standing directly over the Key Club's official banner.)

Although the main purpose of that night's ceremony was to mark the beginning of great things yet to come, I felt that we had already accomplished an enormous amount in very little time. It has seemed as if many things have simply come together throughout the club's founding. The opportunity first presented itself to me on the night of the Kiwanis Club's annual Christmas Dinner last year. I had just finished providing some of the night's entertainment as the drummer for a small jazz quintet, and as I was packing away the last of my instruments before heading home to my homework, I overheard the adults discussing the need for active participation at the high school. At first, I didn't think much of it, for I was unable to see how I could really help, but my dad later told me about the Key Club and how he and my uncle had been active members at their high school in Oakland. I grew more curious and excited about the idea as I considered it further because I too had noticed a growing need at the high school. Many students were becoming frustrated with the lack of access to community service projects and the exclusiveness of existing service clubs. So, I acted quickly, contacting the Kiwanis Club President and the Key Club Headquarters for more information. As I learned more about the club and its basic goals, I realized that this program was exactly what my classmates and I were looking for.

In our short existence so far, the Key Club has already provided a number of exciting opportunities for many of its members. I, especially, have forged numerous wonderful relationships with the influential adults in the Kiwanis Club as well as other leaders in the community. Not only has their experience in society and service proved beneficial to our fledgling club in generating ideas for projects, I have even received a couple of job offers for the upcoming summer from business-owning Kiwanians here in Manitou Springs. In addition to these advantages, the Key Club is famous for its welcoming and open spirit. Unlike other school clubs or community service organizations which might exclude students because of their age or their academic performance, our club is open to anyone with enthusiasm or interest in helping others and sharing good experiences with friends. This aspect is especially important to me because a significant number of my friends as well as my younger brother are either too young or do not achieve sufficient grades in order to participate as much as they would like to. I feel very fortunate to have found and filled this void at my high school, and I look forward to working this year to make it a lasting, productive institution.

As I mentioned before in one of my previous essays, I find the most fulfillment when I can share in the success of a group rather than admire my own individual achievements. When I look at this picture, going over each of the smiling faces and remembering all of the proud parents that congratulated me that night on the successful establishment of the Key Club, I find it difficult to explain how privileged and honored I felt and feel now to lead such a remarkable group of people. I have had my hand in a number of great things over the past four years, finding success in athletics, music, academics, and elsewhere, but this picture represents one of the things in my life that means most to me. Above all, I value the relationships that I make, not only with my closest friends, but with everyone that touches my life in one way or another, and I believe that the Key Club has made it possible for me to give back to those who have given so much to me already. When I think of the importance of these strong relationships in my life, I remember a quote made by Arthur Ashe, a quote that the MSHS Key Club has adopted as its motto: "From what we get we can make a living; what we give, however, makes a life."

# LOVE Catherine Ye

## "A picture is worth a thousand words" as the adage goes. (You're limited to the space provided, however.) Attach a photograph that represents something important to you, and explain its significance.

The Pennsylvania Governor's School for Global Entrepreneurship was the most eye-opening experience of my life. In the five weeks I was at Governor's School I learned more about the world than I could ever learn in a high school classroom. With over five hundred applicants, the forty selected from Pennsylvania were a mix of musicians, athletes, artists, and bookworms. There were also ten international students. Living for five weeks with such a diverse group of people allowed me to see not only the differences between the United States and the world, but also the differences within Pennsylvania.

This photograph was taken at the LOVE sculpture at Lehigh University, where I spent thirty-five days learning with and growing to love the other forty-nine students. From the left, the people are Kevin, Ilana, me, Jay, and Olaf. This photograph happened spontaneously. Ilana and I saw the sculpture and wanted to take a picture of it. Kevin, Jay, and Olaf walked by and decided to jump in.

Kevin is from a rural and relatively poor part of western Pennsylvania. There are no nearby malls and only a total of 1,000 high school students in the entire county. He pulled up the census data on his county and compared it to my own. His county's median income was one third of the median income of my county. His mother is a teacher, the highest paid profession. I had expected other countries to be different, but I was not prepared for the incredibly different lifestyles in my own state, just a couple of hours' drive away.

Ilana's Jewish heritage plays a big part in her life. She is the most orthodox Jew I have ever met. At meals she would bring her own kosher meat, which she kept stocked in her mini-fridge. On Saturdays, she would not write or turn on any lights. Ilana's religion dominated many aspects of her life, which was a stark contrast to my atheist upbringing. I learned more about religion by living across the hallway from her than I would have anywhere else.

Jay would wake up early and run five miles every morning, before I was even awake. He was a devoted athlete - a runner, swimmer, and baseball player. At nights he would practice yoga, and he soon became our yoga instructor. It became a ritual that every night, weather permitting, at 6:30 there would be yoga in the quad. Jay started out looking for inner peace through yoga and ended up finding it with forty-nine others. Not an athlete myself, Jay showed me that exercise was not the formidable task I perceived it to be.

Olaf came to us from East Germany. He tried to teach me some German phrases, but I could never get the accent quite right. He also always carried around an English/German dictionary. Whenever we said a word he could not understand, he would pull out the dictionary and look it up. I admire his dedication to learning the English language. I have been taking Spanish in school for over five years and am still not able to completely understand the Spanish Channel on TV. He is fluent in English, more fluent than I will ever be in Spanish.

I was voted 'Most Energetic' in the Governor's School yearbook. Everything is exciting for me; I never want to miss out on a single moment. For the Talent Show, I put together Cathy's Musical Extravaganza, a dramatic (musical) retelling of the clash between the Titanic and the "lethal iceberg." Enlisting the creative abilities of over twenty classmates, I put together a crew of musicians, actors, and dancers. In just three days I produced (and performed in) a skit complete with a paper Titanic and a human iceberg. After expressing some anxiety about performing in front of everybody, my friend told me, "You're always happy and comfortable, just like a freshly changed baby." My friend's words of wisdom provided a metaphor I will enjoy the rest of my life, and my Musical Extravaganza was a hit, with many calls for an encore.

The fifty Gov Schoolers, as we called ourselves, were all friends. There were no cliques among us, no shunning of classmates, no looking down on others. I have never been in an environment with as much closeness and kinship as Governor's School, and I hope this will continue as I begin my college life; I imagine Stanford will have even more friends and life changing experiences. At the Pennsylvania Governor's School for Global Entrepreneurship there was no enmity or personal grudges, only LOVE.

# Hey Buddy! Craig McFadden

## Jot a note to your future roommate relating a personal experience that reveals something about you.

Hey Buddy!

As we walked home from CoHo last night, I was reminded of the unexpected connections that we share for two guys assembled from opposite corners of the globe. I must admit, when I learned that you were from Shanghai I worried we would have trouble finding common ground. Now I can't imagine this year without your friendship. We have moved beyond geographical borders to form a cultural capital based on the features of our lives.

I still laugh at how dull you find North Dakota to be. For most of my life, I felt the same way. The summer following my junior year in high school, however, Stanford Summer College ignited within me the celebration of the advantages to a rural North Dakota life that many assume is without benefit. By leaving, I discovered my supportive connection to those in Cavalier. Even though I was away from home for the summer, I was surrounded by the enveloped love the mailman delivered each day at 1:30 pm.

The door to my room became plastered with cards and letters, encompassing the entire outside of the frame just as the Christmas cards do at home in Cavalier when the calendar changes to December each year. Holidays there are the best. My summer dormmate Dan told me how his New Jersey Christmas usually consisted of him and his brother walking to Taco Bell. He eagerly listened as I explained dinner with the McFadden family: my grandparents, 14 aunts and uncles, and 18 cousins gathered to share in the feast of turkey and mashed potatoes prepared by my grandma.

What a Frosh year it has been for two guys, one raised along the banks of the Chang Jiang delta of Shanghai, and the other, the Tongue River of Cavalier. My roots in North Dakota have bonded me to those that I care about, yet have allowed me to diverge and connect with others like you in the same way. Here's to creating more great memories this weekend!

~Craigger

P.S. Will you return the movie to Green Library?

# FBLA Craig McFadden

## Of the activities, interests and experiences listed on the previous page, which is the most meaningful to you, and why?

I worked for months to prepare for the Future Business Leaders of America (FBLA) state office election. I designed my flyers and baseball-style trading cards, delivered my speech to the 150 electors, and campaigned during the state conference, asking voters to "place their order for the Big Mac-Fadden." Yet, tears trickled down my cheek when "Cassandra Mindt" flashed on the screen where "Craig McFadden" should have appeared. Although I lost the election, I was determined to continue to thrive in the organization. I reminded myself that the most valuable experiences don't come without challenges.

Four months later, I was rewarded with an invitation to serve on the nine-state Mountain Plains Region Membership Committee. The position was a platform to connect with students and community leaders at the national level. I was excited to utilize the leadership skills I had gained as Cavalier's local chapter President to enhance membership and community service throughout the Mountain Plains region. I dedicated myself to the position, creating a member-recruitment video and coordinating the March to Denver fundraiser for the March of Dimes.

My work with FBLA has required me to apply the knowledge learned in the classroom outside of the school environment. I put into practice the skills I developed on my high school's TechTeam by teaching an online-safety course to the sixth-grade class. The room erupted in laughter as one student questioned if he could catch a virus from his computer, and I knew I had made a difference. Learning through service activities such as this, I appreciate the importance of accepting challenges and the opportunities that lie within.

# The Competitive Edge David Diaz

## As you reflect on your life thus far, what has someone said, written or expresed in some fashion that is especially meaningful to you? Why?

Sometimes life throws us challenges that are unexpected and scary, as well as obstructive to our goals and dreams. A few years ago my mother became ill concurrent with the dot com bust. She was diagnosed with lymphatic cancer, her third type of cancer, and as a result we lost our house, our income, our security, and life as I had always known it changed dramatically.

Initially we were forced to live in my Uncle's backyard, in his fifth wheel camping trailer. I thought my dreams of college and a future were over. I started to let life push me around; forgetting I was a competitor I almost gave up my dreams.

Fortunately my positive upbringing and competitive nature kicked in. I realized I had a choice and I fought back. I stopped the negative thoughts and fought the anxiety and fears that were detrimental to the rest of my academic career and my future. I pushed myself harder in school; I succeeded. I am proud of the tenacity and drive that allowed me to accomplish more than I thought possible in academics and extracurricular achievements. I refused to let the tough times in my early teens decide the course of my future.

It is apparent to me that my scholastic career was fostered and funded by family and friends. Their support, both financial and emotional, was instrumental in helping me take the necessary courses and classes that prepared me for college. Since high school began, I have never been able to pay for things or go places on my own that my friends and other students have been able to do. This is one of the main reasons why I want to go to college. With a college degree, I will be able to provide for my mother and myself, as well as be able to do things that without a degree would be impossible. I want to be able to provide for myself as well as those who are close to me.

Unfortunately, because of my financial status, I have not been able to take advantage of many opportunities that others have been able to capitalize on. However, as stated before, I have taken advantage of every opportunity that was financially feasible. Although I could not capitalize on many opportunities, I made sure that I got involved in activities based on the same themes as the educational programs. For example, I have had many offers to go to different law, political, and leadership forums; however they were in the price range of two thousand dollars and more; obviously out of my price range. Since I couldn't attend these forums, I made sure that I was still involved in the political arena by volunteering for the state senator and working for the local Democratic Club. Becoming involved with local politics helped me gain a sense of purpose and gave me insight into the workings of our government. It further proved to me that I want to pursue my goal of becoming a lawyer and joining the political arena in the future.

Moments such as the loss of a family member, or the loss of life as you know it can be very traumatizing and may seem to be insurmountable challenges at the time. You can give up or fight back. I learned to face and overcome whatever obstacles and challenges crop up in life. It drove me to excel in almost everything that I have attempted, and I plan to maintain this attitude as my life progresses.

# Tie a Knot and Hang On JiJun Chow

## As you reflect on your life thus far, what has someone said, written or expressed in some fashion that is especially meaningful to you? Why?

"Hey! Change your away message. It's so OLD!" The chat window pops up onto the screen of my computer. Cool. One of my friends just messaged me. Wait. What is wrong with my away message? Its font and color are conspicuous enough to alert others when I am busy. It is a quote from Thomas Jefferson: "When you reach the end of your life, tie a knot in it and hang on." As I read the quote, I think back to the evening five years ago when I first saw it.

It is midnight. The clock is ticking. Mrs. Ye who lives next door and takes pleasure in complaining about the noises that I make is turning off her lights. My parents' eyes are in a constant battle with gravity while watching me conquer another math problem. My bed is secretly ordering me to surrender to the exotic alphabet on the paper. My eyes are watery and burning from reading all the definitions that do not seem to make sense in my mind. "Difference between (x+1)2 and 2x?" I flip though my dictionary and find the definition: "Difference: noun. The quality of being unlike." If difference means not the same, why is this word used here? The gears in my head creak tiredly, threatening to stop working in the midst of my confusion. For the first time I feel the strangeness of the numbers which have always been my royal soldiers of genius. I cannot answer the problem without understanding what it is asking for. I am not consoled by the fact that there are dozens of other immigrant students at the school who cannot understand English. I don't think I can ever forgive my parents for not bringing me to America sooner. Will I ever conquer the language known as English?

Tired, confused, and on the verge of tears, I turn off the lamp and get up. Even the planner that my parents gave me for my birthday is mocking me. Dreaded thoughts of the numerous things that still need to be done fill my frantic mind. I take a deep breath and open the planner. The quote on the top of page three awakens me. It is something Thomas Jefferson had once said: "When you reach the end of your life, tie a knot in it and hang on." Strangely enough I somehow understand its English. End of life, tie and hang on Yes, yes, I know what it is saying. My heart is branded with those words in a flash. Inspiration fills my mind and rejuvenates my body. I feel a strange familiarity with the quote as if it had been written for me for that very moment.

As I read the quote over again, I see an adventurer who is about to fall off the edge of a cliff and ties himself to the only rock in sight; a deep sea diver who is running out of air and inches his way back up to the world above; and a marathon runner whose legs threaten to give out and continues to keep his eyes on that finish line. Thinking of all those scenarios, I realize that I am a coward. I am nowhere near the end of my life, yet I am acting as if the language barrier is the end of the world. From the moment I set foot onto the plane heading towards a new life in America, my mind was filled with new ambitions. Yet frustrations with the English language have often defeated my longing for progress. It is the quote by Thomas Jefferson that is shoving me towards the future with new hope. I know that eventually, Mrs. Ye will no longer tease me about my English pronunciation, my parents will no longer complain about their inability to help me, and the pile of books on my desk will no longer be a formidable nightmare. I am now holding tight onto my baton. The quote is teaching me how to hang on. "Go back to work, never fall." I pick up my confidence and find myself eager to confront the math problems. So here I go, rolling up my sleeves, returning to the battleground, and plunging into the world of the unknown.

"Change your away message!" The chat window shatters my thoughts. So here I am, five years later, sitting on the cool black leather chair, contemplating the college admission essay. "No, I am NOT going to change it. It's been driving me forward. You wouldn't understand." I send that instant message to my friend, taking pride in the secure feeling that no one else can feel.

# Vignette Christine Peng

## "A picture is worth a thousand words" as the adage goes. Attach a photograph that represents something important to you, and explain its significance.

Sitting in a dingy, cramped restaurant waiting for the carts of brunch dishes to pass by, I look like your average American teen - Calvin Klein t-shirt, khakis, a look of disgruntlement and impatience on my face. I should be making up this week's sleep debt. Finally, the tea arrives at our table, and the smell refreshes me ever so slightly, the aroma of jasmine leaves lifting my mood. That is, until

"Don't pour her tea," declares my father.

The teapot slows to a halt on its journey to my cup. My mother rolls her eyes at the voice but places it back on the table anyways. It sits there patiently, silently shouting to tip it over and pour it out. So I lazily heed its command, and it resumes its trip until

"Are you just going to pour it for yourself? What about your mother?"

Translation: "Pour it for me, too."

The teapot is getting grumpy by now, so I relieve it a bit by pouring my mother, and then my father, tea. Finally, it is my turn to drink, and I bring the teapot towards me for the third time, until

"You know, it's okay if it's just us, but if there were other adults here, you can't do that. It's rude not to pour tea for others first. We're old and you're young, you should show more respect and serve us first. I shouldn't have to remind you to do it, and you shouldn't wait for others to serve you. It's traditional to do it if you're youngest."

I, unfortunately, whether with my parents or family friends, am always unfailingly the youngest. By now, I just eye the teapot wondering if it's worth the effort to pick it up again or if it's just futile. This has been Tea Lecture #2,830,245. My hand reaches forward for the handle again, but this time

My father's hand beats mine to the needy pot, and the teacup before me is finally cured of its emptiness. His paternal expression is one of restrained pride and affectionate resignation as I gaze on amusedly and a bit uncomfortably. This is certainly a first.

"Well, it is Chinese New Year's. I guess I can do it once."

It seems that despite the mental barrier of self-interest and independence in my rebellious teenage mind, Confucius and his army of ideas have nevertheless been firmly rooted in my subconscious. I feel as if some ancient law has been broken, as if I have committed sacrilege just by allowing my father to stoop to pouring tea for his own child.

So I extend my hand once again - and tap my forefinger - once, twice, thrice, until the cup is filled. Once, an emperor traveling in disguise while surveying his lands poured tea for a servant of his, who - knowing his ruler's true identity yet commanded not to give it away - could do nothing but nervously tap his finger in reverence. Or so the story goes.

In the murky depths of my filled cup lies a submerged identity, the one layered over with Seinfeld and Beatles and Chick-fil-A. Having moved at the mere age of four, I had very little opportunity to experience being Chinese in China. At first, resistance was strong against the clutch of Americanism - my refusal to eat salad, my attempts every night to sneak out of the apartment and run away back to my homeland - but weeks passed, and soon I shook my head furiously when asked if I wanted to return. My face beamed with pride whenever teachers inquired if I was born here, because "your English is so good", and I began exhibiting patriotism, cheering for the U.S. in the Olympics while my parents still rooted on China. Yet there is still a part of me that lectures about respect and quotes ancient sayings of practical wisdom. Somewhere in my individual person survives a connection to the parents whose lives in Cultural Revolution China I could never fully comprehend, to the grandparents once so dear to me whom I now shy away from, to the culture that is an inseparable part of me no matter how integrated into American society I become.

The food comes, and my Oriental side becomes more noticeable. Not many Americans devour chicken claws with relish, along with various other slightly odd dishes. Then comes the lucky color red, bringing in its paper folds the very lucky gift money. We celebrate the passing of horse to sheep in the zodiac line and call our relatives when we get home. Yet that special celebration is not needed everyday to connect me to my home country thousands of miles away or my cultural heritage thousands of years before. The essence of being Chinese is passed down simply through a relic of ancient imperial times - an unassuming cup of tea.

# Cultural Identity Alison Root

## Pick a photograph and describe its significance to you.

The gold embroidered collar of the traditional Chinese blouse tickled my neck. The costume was old, musty, unwashed, and uncomfortable. Are family photos ever enjoyable? Far to my right, through teeth clenched by a top-heavy headdress, my oldest sister Megan mumbled for me to stop itching. Finally, the photographer motioned with a forceful wave of his hand for us to gaze up to the ceiling of the studio. This ordeal was orchestrated by a man who spoke little more than five words of English, his favorite being "cheese!". As he readied his disposable camera, we assumed the facade of three ancient Chinese empresses looking toward our sky of destiny. Such a pensive moment would make for a quality Christmas postcard. Our contemplative posture was rewarded with one revelation: our family photo shoot had attracted a sizeable crowd. Tourists and locals alike stood outside the studio window to witness our photographer and his genuine attempt to portray our Caucasian family with the honor and intrigue of imperial China. This slightly ridiculous photograph now sits in the office of our stereotypical home in the Chicago suburbs.

Exchanging this house for a 33rd floor apartment on the south side of Hong Kong island at age six seemed like a natural progression of events to my pre-K mind. After four years in Hong Kong, and three years in Singapore, living as an expatriate was the only life I ever knew. However, my return to the US at age thirteen afforded me the sudden realization that my childhood was, without question, unique and extraordinary. For seven years, I had had the opportunity to live as a minority both racially and culturally. My social and cultural development stemmed from bargaining with the street vendors, being pulled aside for photographs with strangers, due to my blond hair and blue eyes, and taking field trips to visit pen pals in China. I automatically immersed myself into Asian culture more than a majority of my American classmates and subconsciously plunged into the challenge of living overseas. Despite my joy at the opening of Taco Bell I preferred to eat at local hawker stalls while my classmates craved McDonald's. I was placed in the accelerated stream for Mandarin while others viewed this mandatory class as useless and impossible. And I joined the percussion group and developed a specialization in the gong and Chinese drum.

My youth kept me from realizing the full effect of such experiences on my American identity; the person that left Illinois quickly and happily adapted to the world perspective that thrived in the Asian cities. I returned to the US with a foreigner's outlook and a bit of ignorance about America. It came as a surprise, though understandable, that most of my friends had barely left the Midwest, much less the country. Regardless, I was shocked to find an absence of curiosity for the rest of the world, despite their lack of travel. My experience as a minority was one that others could, and should, benefit from. Thus, I began my immersion back into American culture cherishing this strange photograph that hung on the inside of my locker at Kennedy Junior High.

For the past five years, I have carried my childhood experiences with me to better my community. Rather than remain passive and disappointed, I have made it my priority to expose the world of diversity to my peers and to highlight the diversity that exists within our own community. In high school, my uncondescending and unoppressive manner helped this project meet success. Through class projects and a plethora of extracurricular activities, I found many avenues to convey my childhood values. Academically I wrote persuasive letters, and did presentations crusading for more history classes to focus on Asia. I became the News Editor for the school paper where I wrote features on cultural apathy in Americans. I acted as the President of Junior State of America, a political forum for sharing ideas on policy and ethics, as well as the Co-Captain, and co-founder of our school Debate Team. These political organizations have allowed me to learn about domestic and international issues, while exposing my peers (and me) to many opinions and varied backgrounds which I find to be intellectually stimulating. I have continued to witness different forms of diversity in action by serving on the Naperville Fair Housing Advisory Commission where I was a student appointee. Socially, I am known as a human geography book as well as resident supplier of the latest Hello Kitty fashions.

While my efforts to make Naperville's students a bit worldlier were met with occasional success and oftentimes skepticism, I am perhaps equally proud of the cultural re-education that Naperville has given me. I have learned a great deal about America. I now have an intimate relationship with American pop culture, where I have established a firm bond with US Weekly, as well as many cult classic films. In the end, I see this exchange as quite healthy and beneficial to both parties. I have opened my eyes to American culture and values once again, and I believe that I have made an impression of global importance on many of the people that I interacted with. Regardless of whether my friends in Naperville know their geography, it is clear that many will leave high school realizing that there is more to the world and to the human experience than that in the contiguous United States.

It can be discerned from our most recent family photograph, where we are clad in jeans and black T-shirts that we have adapted well to our new lives. However, we still carry our experiences in an active manner, as the subtleties in the photograph attest - my ring with the Chinese character for prosperity, my sister's jade necklace, and the glint in our eyes. We are not quite the average American family.

# Dear Roommate... Blake Masters

## Please jot a note to your future roommate that explains something about what kind of person you are.

Roommate,

The following is an account of one of my most memorable experiences - I hope you can use it to gauge what kind of person I am. Last summer, I went with my family and a friend's family to Italy. After an early dinner in Florence, my friend and I began juggling a soccer ball in an empty piazza (we both play soccer for our high school). We had heard the tales of crazy European street soccer games, but had at this point yet to see them for ourselves. After a few minutes, we were interrupted by a quiet Italian man who silently signaled that he wanted to play with us. Seeing this, other passers-by wanted to join in too. Much to our surprise and delight, the piazza was filled with about 20 eager participants within minutes. Rearranging public trashcans as goal markers, we played tirelessly on the picturesque cobblestone courtyard for literally hours on end. I was taken aback by the feelings of accord that seemed to inhabit that piazza - all cliches aside, those feelings I got are the reason why this experience remains distinguished in my mind. To see American tourists, Italian artists, and Kenyan vendors all forget their worries and differences and play a great game together was truly amazing. That night, the official language on that piazza wasn't Italian or English; it was a language of smiles, laughs, and high-fives - a language everybody understood and came to love.

-Blake

# What Matters Most Blake Masters

## "Simplify, simplify, simplify," wrote Henry David Thoreau. If you were to follow Thoreau's advice and give up most of your possessions, which ones would you keep, and why?

If I were to follow Henry David Thoreau's advice to simplify my life and eliminate any unnecessary possessions, I would find myself with perhaps half a dozen of the most important left. It is said that one can tell a lot about a person by his most prized possessions. Knowing this, I made a good effort to think of what objects are really necessary in my life, and the following are some that I would retain.

First, I would keep my soccer boots. While my teammates eagerly browse through soccer catalogues each September and buy the latest European models, I have proudly worn my beat-up Adidas Copa Mundial boots for three years - the entire span of my Varsity soccer career. Like most meaningful relationships, the bond between my cleats and me was unplanned; I had no intention of holding on to these boots for three years when I first bought them. I guess they sort of grew on me, almost like extensions of my feet. I treat them with leather conditioning and buffering after each use, and have found that in reciprocity they treat me very well on the field. My boots have such a great meaning because playing soccer has been such a great outlet for me during high school - kicking the ball around has always been a stress reliever and an effective relaxation technique. My boots seem to represent everything that the sport of soccer means to me, which has thus far been a great deal. Hopefully, come next fall, my boots and I will be able to play some intense games on the Stanford Club team.

Another possession that I would need to keep would be my library card (provided, of course, that access to a public library be available). To me, this little strip of plastic is much more valuable than any credit or debit card look-alikes. One may cringe at the cliche, but the world is genuinely at my fingertips when I have my card with me. Virtually any intellectual interest of mine can be satisfied by a trip to the library, for there is sure to be some book or reference that has the answer to my question or wonder. I do not want to give the wrong impression here; my library card is not entirely about answering questions. I have found that getting lost in a book and reading for leisure are great ways to pass time. Whether I end up borrowing a Middle English version of Chaucer's Canterbury Tales, a copy of The Federalist Papers, or a Spanish novella like Como Agua Para Chocolate, my card represents a wealth of knowledge and fun that greets me as soon as I walk in through the automatic double doors of the public library.

"A dog is a man's best friend," as the old adage goes. I believe this to be true. Don't get me wrong - human friends can be and usually are fantastic companions. The problem is that human interactions and relationships can often become complicated or forced. This can never happen with a dog. For instance, take my 2-year-old Yellow Lab Scout. He doesn't hold any grudges. No matter what, Scout always wags his tail when I get home and is sincerely happy to see me. Some might call this a lack of emotional depth, but I call it a sign of true friendship. Unlike some girls, Scout will never become angry should I forget to call, and unlike some guys, Scout will never get upset because I may play too physically on the basketball court. He was my friend yesterday, is my friend today, and I know that he will be there for me tomorrow and all the days to follow. While not a true 'possession,' I would definitely include Scout on this list - that I must leave him behind when I go to college is sure to be one of the hardest aspects of the whole transition.

# My Skin Bailey McRae

## 'A picture is worth a thousand words,' as the adage goes. (You're limited to one page, however.) Select a photograph no larger than 3.5 x 5 inches that represents something important to you, and explain its significance.

My skin. Something biologically insignificant, yet socially so powerful. According to The Scientist magazine on February 18, 2002, those visible traits that humans use to define "race" make up only .01% of our genes. Race, biologically speaking, doesn't exist. But in social terms, race can mean everything.

I suppose if I am to explain my multiracial heritage I should start with my parents. My mom was from upstate New York, where there were only white people. Not that the town had hated people of other races, but it was just a small, isolated town up in the Adirondacks. My dad was from Ohio. He came from a family that was Black, Irish, and Native American. When my parents were married in South Carolina, the justice of the peace gave my mom one last chance to change her mind before she married a Negro.

Growing up I didn't really understand my race. Friends and teachers would ask me, "Bailey, what are you?" I had to explain to them my racial background and then immediately defend my race, because most of the time people did not believe me. I was hurt that people would question my own identity. People would ask if I thought of myself as black or white. I always answered these questions in terms of race, and looking back, I wish I had answered differently. I could have told them anything about me, but instead I let my identity always focus on race.

In elementary school, whenever we drew self portraits the black kids had dark crayons to color in their faces. The white kids had light crayons to color in their faces. I attempted to use the two crayons together one time, and I ended up with a blotchy looking face. There was no "Bailey" colored crayon for me. Whenever I registered at a school or took a standardized test, there was always the question that asked for a specific race. You were only allowed to fill in one bubble, and it upset me that I had to choose.

I could not find myself in my race, for I was really nothing. In my freshman year of school I dated a young man who was Guamanian. I was fascinated by his culture. It seemed to define him so well: he could speak Chamorru, his native tongue. His mom would make traditional Guamanian dishes when I came over for dinner. He would tell me stories about when he went back to visit his family on the island. I was so impressed that he had a whole culture to define him. There was no mistaking who he was and where he came from. But what about me?

I have a hard time connecting with my ethnic roots. It seems like there are about 3 black people in all of Arizona, excluding my family. I have tried listening to R. Kelly and Nas. I have tried watching BET and movies like Undercover Brother. But it just isn't me. I can't "get jiggy wit it". My family has helped connect to my roots though. I often go with my grandfather when he plays piano at jazz sessions. I receive books every year from family members about famous black people in history.

Today, I have not figured out everything about myself. I still have a hard time with my racial ambiguity. But I do know that the color of my skin is not an all encompassing characteristic. I am creating my own identity around what I've done, my plans for my future, and my family. I hope that someday I will stop letting my race limit myself, and that someday society won't let race limit me either.

# Catching the Spirit Anonymous

## Describe why you want to transfer to Stanford.

I don't try to deny it. I hate football. Or rather, in stereotypical female fashion, I simply don't understand it. I never bothered to learn because it just didn't appeal to me. So when my brother handed me a ticket to the 86th Rose Bowl game, I looked at it, then told him to have a good time. After all, he actually likes football.

"No," he laughed. "It's for you. I want you to come."

Now it was my turn to laugh. What was I going to do at a football game?

After much convincing, though, I agreed to go. I figured my arguments against the game would be stronger if I could say that I actually went to one, and hated it.

And so it happened that I - the one who organized anti-Superbowl parties (complete with a sit-down dinner and a stack of romance movies) - ended up at the Stanford-Wisconsin game last year.

Don't get me wrong. I love sports. I've played tennis, softball and volleyball since elementary school and I love my Lakers. But I never seemed to quite get the hang of football.

Walking among the 80,000 people at the Rose Bowl that January afternoon, I felt like I was going to drown in a Red Sea. I knew I should at least try to enjoy myself, since the game was three hours long, but admittedly, I didn't have the best attitude going in.

From my seat in the student section, though, I couldn't help but laugh at the band and join in with the cheers of the crowd. And by halftime, my voice was already hoarse from yelling.

It wasn't so much the football that got me. I'm not even sure if half the people around me were there for the actual game. Even my brother was having more fun joking with friends and waving his Stanford flag around than following the action on the field.

The energy was infectious. I saw entire families dressed in Stanford regalia, from the 80-year-old alumnus in his letterman sweater to the 18-month-old baby, barely able to walk but fiercely clutching a Stanford rattle. And what I realized was that, just like me, these fans didn't love football - but they loved their school.

I have yet to experience the same sense of overwhelming spirit. No matter that Stanford didn't even win the game; the excitement was enough. Just the common tie to Stanford was enough to link together all sorts of people, from young to old, male to female, hard-core football fans to "I'd-rather-bake-a-quiche" non-football types like me. But if the Cardinal spirit can make even me, the most disbelieving of disbelievers, enjoy a football game, it's definitely something worth reliving.

Or maybe I'm just beginning to like football.

Then again, I doubt that.

# Bicycle Stanford Tran

## "A picture is worth a thousand words" as the adage goes. (You're limited to the space provided, however.) Attach a photograph (either online or hard copy with the paper application) no larger than 5 x 7 inches that represents something important to you, and explain its significance.

In the early chill of the morning, as I hug the curvature of the mountain on my bike, my mind is open. The baritone of the whirling wheels, the bass of the humming tires on asphalt, the tenor of the creaky chain, all punctuated by the intermittent clicking of shifting gears mingle to compose a harmonic tune. My deep rhythmic breathing lulls my mind into a deep state of rest. I do not think of the past or future. I am immersed in the singularity of the present: going up.

Three short hours ago, I left my garage in the chilly morning. I imagined I am Lance Armstrong, flying up the Alpe d'Huez. One by one, I would drop my responsibilities on the last leg of the 68 km stage. I hear the announcer over my earpiece, "My goodness, this unknown rider is pushing the pace on Alpe d'Huez and splitting up the peloton! Jalabert had crackedOlano is gone. Only Ullrich and Pantani have managed to stay with him." Bonds and shackles are breaking, making me freer every moment. "And he attacks! The time only Ulrich managed to respond. It's a two-way race now. The others are out of the picture. The unknown rider is pulling ahead."

And then a middle-aged man zips by me. I forget I am on the slopes of Mount Hamilton, inching up the 4,000-foot climb on a creaky old mountain bike. A hint of a condescending smirk appears at the corner of his mouth trying to hide his pity at this impudent teenager. I remind myself my purpose here is not here to entertain passersby, but to achieve an ambition. Last summer, I tested myself with a 63-mile round trip to Coyote Point weaving through the traffic of El Camino, though at the end, it was all too easy. The reward that is intrinsic of accomplishing a genuine challenge was not there. A week ago, I had opened a map and picked the highest peak to ascend. All 4,000 feet starting from home. On a bike. Alone.

My bike sways in cadence as I stand on the pedals, powering up the steep grade. The only relief comes at the flattening of the road at the switchback turns themselves. A blur of color barrels down on the other side of the road. His two-wheeled machine probably costs two grand and weighs half as much as mine. Any hint of envy is quickly overtaken by pride. My bike is a piece of art in itself. At one time, it lay in three 5-gallon buckets. All parts of my bike had been scavenged from thrown away bikes; a set of spokes here and a derailleur cable there. Every single bearing, race, and brake pad has passed through my inspection. I blew the breath of life onto my bike. When we ride, my bike and I are one. We may not be the fastest or the lightest, but there is an unbeatable richness of being homebrewed.

As I rounded the switchbacks, Lick Observatory did not seem any closer than 10 miles and 1200 feet back. All my granola bars and water have disappeared into my stomach eons ago, too long ago to remember. The bright sun and cold, dry air illuminate the mountainside in a crisp clarity. I am precarious balanced on the edge of lunacy, yet I have never felt my thoughts so clear. What if I do not make it? It does not matter. Time intertwines with nature and disappears. One revolution at a time, I am going to the top to nowhere.

Memories of the long, rewarding hours in the cramped garage came flooding back. My father and I worked side-by-side, switching roles every so often to relieve the soreness. Though not the most time efficient process, the personal rewards gained are well worth the time. He learned his skills as a bicycle and motorcycle repairperson in Vietnam, operating out of a little shack at home. He has come a long way. Now, I am here next to him, inheriting his love for handy-work while he passes on a little of himself to me. I cherish every moment working in that cold, cramped, under-lit garage next to my father.

Still no closer to the top than before, I catch the last glimpse of the sunlight shimmering across the hazy valley in the distance before me. About to collapse, I watch the sunset in awe atop of the world on my bike. I come accept and love all things as they are. Encrust in sweat, I have never been happier in my life. I look forward to satisfying buzz of my sprocket: it is all downhill from here.

# My Small Step Philip Chui

## As you reflect on your life thus far, what has someone said, written or expressed in some fashion that is especially meaningful to you?

When Neil Armstrong landed on the moon and unraveled one very small piece of the galactic mystery, he said, "That's one small step for a man, one giant leap for mankind." However, my "small step" in unraveling a different mystery started in a very different setting.

"Code Blue! Room 31 North!" Alarms blared as nurses frantically paged one doctor after another. Within minutes, doctors from every direction swarmed into one room only to file out somberly before the crash cart even arrived. Finally, the last doctor came out and was immediately besieged by the patient's relatives. He apologized, "Lo siento." The family broke down in inconsolable wails, and my heart crashed. Why does it have to be that happy nine-month-old infant who always wore a smile despite the fact that she had more tubes connected to her than she had blood vessels? Was it just last week when I played with her, keeping her company while her parents worked? Although she had both spina bifida and end-stage cancer, she was a brave little girl. For the first time in my life, I witnessed death happening before my eyes. In my subsequent volunteering at the cancer ward and at the PICU in Lucille Packard Children's Hospital, I was saddened by similar news: countless kids, many of whom I had just talked to, played games with, or watched TV together, passed away. For weeks, I had nightmares, haunted by those innocent sweet faces. I longed to do something for my young friends; unfortunately, all my compassion and love could not cure their illnesses or alleviate their pain and suffering. Eventually, my despair and helplessness melded into a driving force, catapulting me to take some positive action.

As I began my junior year, I contacted over 400 professors, expressing my desire to learn as much as possible about infants, particularly their thought processes. To my dismay, most never replied, and the ones who did, expressed that while they would be delighted to give me a chance, they simply were not allowed to have high school kids as interns because of insurance policies and liabilities. Fortunately, Dr. Rosanne Kermoian, of the Stanford Neurodevelopmental Laboratory, empathized my passions and shared my emotions, for she too witnessed the death of an infant. The professor soon granted me an internship to work at her laboratory the following summer, allowing me to conduct my research and promising to provide me with any resource I needed.

From June to August, I devoted myself wholeheartedly to my research, often working twelve to thirteen hours per day trying to plan out, conduct, and complete a project that would be worthy of publication. Dr. Kermoian recommended that I think about one aspect of infant behavior that particularly intrigued me. I chose to focus on children's neurological development and its association with physical motor skills because I had interacted with many babies with motor disabilities, primarily spina bifida. From them, I had also noticed that their impaired motor movements often resulted in weakened spatial-visual performance, for these children would often reach for an object, only to entirely miss the target. Thus, I began an endless study of testing babies, scoring the results, and reading one journal article after another to gain the required knowledge to conduct the project. Many times, frustration set in; it was difficult to work with babies who were only 8.5 months old because they were unable to communicate to me verbally. To test these babies, I designed an algorithm that monitored the simple yet informative non-verbal communication, such as hand jerks, eye movement, hand coupling, or posture changes. The algorithm soon provided me with over 60,000 data points in 265 variables.

After translating all the data into different scales and after conducting multi-variable analyses, I confirmed that there is a general relationship between crawling and visual-spatial capacity and that locomotion directly enhances infants' visual-spatial intelligence. Locomotion helps them not only to perceive the world three-dimensionally but also to establish a sense of direction and to strengthen hand-eye coordination. However, further studies revealed that Asian babies' performance contradict our hypothesis. As a Chinese, I was particularly piqued by this ethnic-specific anomaly. Therefore, my professor and I contacted the University of Beijing in order to launch a joint study on the same topic, specifically on Chinese children. Initially, the task proved to be extremely difficult because of language barriers, ethical issues, and time zone differences. However, the data they provided were invaluable. We found that Chinese children are often withheld from crawling either because of the way they are raised or the environment in which they live. Though their performance on spatial tasks is relatively poor in comparison to that of American children at 8.5 months, they eventually develop the same skills through neurological maturation. Although the data on the Chinese babies were hard to interpret, they filled in some of our knowledge gaps to the research project.

Currently, my professor and I have begun our first draft. Though our paper is still far from publication phase, which we anticipate to take three years, I have already entitled our thesis: "Object Retrieval in 8.5 Month Old Infants: a Multi-Cultural Study Documenting the Effects of Locomotion Experience and Maturation on Infant Visual-Spatial Capacity." Like Neil Armstrong whose exploration shed some light on our understanding of the universe, my research has shed some light on our understanding of the human mind. While I cannot claim that I have made a "giant leap" for mankind, I have certainly made a small step towards achieving my dream of helping children. One day, after many of these small steps, perhaps I can then make that "giant leap" in pediatric neurology.

# Searching Through the Mess Stephen Hirsch

## Tell us about a risk you have taken.

I'm the last one into the room. I was busy responding to an "I remember you" from Airianna, a five-year-old girl I had tutored a few weeks ago. I remembered her too; remembered how much I had liked her name, remembered getting none of her work done, remembered playing her version of tic-tac-toe, which consisted of a playing grid of 112 squares and no apparent rules, and especially remembered her asking me if I was a boy or girl, for she thought I was a boy but my "fancy hair" was throwing her off. So I am last into the room full of the other weekly volunteers. The room, this whole place in fact, seems to sag with an exhausted sadness and defeat at the hands of age and neglect.

Adam, our leader, reflects, "It could seem that there's not a lot of meaning in making dinner for these people or sometimes even in helping a kid with homework. I mean, how are you supposed to find meaning in cooking cheap macaroni and cheese, value in washing filthy dishes, or beauty in kindergarten math? But that's the challenge. That, what we do in that kitchen, that's a mess. So finding meaning in the mess, finding value and even beauty, is the challenge. And it's a hard one, because to search often involves a risk."

I am reminded of the summer I naively plunged into that great risk of humanity: love. I am reminded of the story of Daphne. I met her the last day of school sophomore year, and throughout most of the summer I chased her through a confusing forest where brilliant shafts of light occasionally blasted their way through the treetops. But in the end it was a big mess, and, as she transformed into a tree right in front of me, I was angrily confused. I am a person, with all the complexity, value, individuality, and importance that entails. How could I be shrugged off? How could I be forgotten or ignored? How could I be cut out of a stack of photographs and tossed into her trash can? But me sitting here being bewildered by her disconnecting from me is me sitting here being a hypocrite. Because the truth is she's a person too, and so how could I forget about and ignore her, how could I so aloofly dismiss her as crazy and wrong?

The plastic stars stuck to the bedroom ceiling seem funny to me as I think of them as a sign of frustration that roofs are necessary. Travis is talking about Christie and Michigan, and because it's a slightly similar situation to mine, the conversation leads us to talk about her.

"And her dad started yelling at me too!" I'm saying hours laterr. "They don't even get along, but they seemed to have an all right time teaming up against me. And I'm always really confused, like I don't know if it's her depression or..."

"That's stupid," Travis interrupts. "You're sixteen years old. You don't need stuff like this; you should just be out having fun. My advice is to just get away from her." It's just a stupid risk that I need to stop taking.

I remember about two or three weeks ago, I was sitting in front of the TV but not really watching because I was thinking about her and my confusions. My mom started talking to me about dinner or something but her deep maternal instincts saw how sick and dying I was somewhere inside.

She concluded poison, deadly and acting upon the heart, and said, "I don't know exactly what's going on between you and her, but you can come to me about anything." "I'm too sensitive for this," my self-pity mumbled as she left the room.

And so tonight I fall asleep with "I don't deserve this" as my mantra.

Love turned out to pose a risk into which I had unsuspectingly plunged headfirst. And so as "I don't deserve this" quickly became "I didn't deserve that," I did what was easiest: I disconnected and isolated myself from that world, that mess, created by her and me. I fled the risk. And that's a cop-out, because by simply dusting myself off and running away, I'll never find what I'm looking for, never find the meaning, value, and beauty that are there. I didn't search the mess when I should have, in fact I renounced it, and now I can't: I've forgotten how I felt. I tell the story of Daphne to people, few people, and always end it with, "In short, she broke my heart." But when I say that I do so jokingly with a half-smile on my face, because it's a fitting and comically delivered clich, and because I disconnected and thus lost and forgot any true feelings that ever accompanied that statement. And so, like that hard-hearted nymph from Apollo, enlightenment escapes me.

But now there's Julia, intertwined with my life and thoughts in a way that elates, very often distracts, and ultimately escapes my rational understanding. In the winter she would draw in the frost on my windows, and I would wish for her window writing to reappear with every new frost, filling my car with warmth and joy. I envision myself in some unknown future, on some unknown and desolate stretch of highway blanketed by winter darkness and cold. Headlights approach from behind, illuminating my rear window. As I glance into my mirror I see it, sublimely reincarnated from those frosty nights still warm in my memory, the slender and beautiful finger-width line dancing and looping itself playfully into that tri-syllabic representation of joy in my life. And then I either cry or laugh or both, and people ask me who Julia is and why she deserves that tattoo, and I can't tell them anything just jokingly or without a half-smile of sincerity and longing rather than apathy and forgetfulness. And so, like this girl in my heart, I embrace the challenge. I'm taking the risk.

# The Oracle Michael Jin

## "A picture is worth a thousand words" the adage goes. (You're limited to the space provided, however.) Attach a photograph no larger than 3.5 x 5 inches that represents something important you, and explain its significance." [The essay was accompanied by a photo of Pythia: http://www.sciam.com/media/inline/0009BD34-398C-1F0A-97AE80A84189EEDF\_1.jpg]

The December breeze seeps through the cracked-open door, but I only feel my heart, throbbing in eerie unison with the clock behind me. At a heartbeat a second, my heart will beat ten thousand eight hundred times before editing of The Oracle finishes for the night. "Kiss me," I scribble. Keep it short and simple for me. As my pen continues to glide steadily across the printout of Forum page five, my muscles slacken and my mind tenses. Only mental endurance, not fleshly strength, is needed to outrace time.

Time. Six days every month, I am drawn to the L-14 computer lab, home of The Oracle. I am like a moth drawn to bright light, though the attraction of newspaper production is less deadly, its only consequences being lost sleep and bleary eyes. I remember the first time I saw editors manipulating their page elements in Adobe Indesign. The sight enthralled me. The production process -- of presenting three-dimensional ideas in a two-dimensional manner -- had never seemed so alive. L-14 hummed with the fans of twenty blueberry iMacs and smelled faintly of extra-buttery popcorn. I could feel the devotion and energy.

The most memorable interview I conducted that sophomore year was with Kazuo Yamazaki, a senior who loved writing rap and freestyling -- activities far removed from my own cultural domain. Reading from my list of questions, I wondered whether I would understand the responses -- was I even asking the right questions? But Kazuo talked. He remembered playing baseball passionately for ten years -- until he was cut from the team, dashing his hopes of turning pro. He told me how he turned to rap -- honest rap that never glorified drug dealing. "I don't write about lies," he said. "I write about hardships." As Kazuo proceeded to recount a humorous story, the beginning of a smile formed on my lips. And then suddenly we started laughing. I abandoned the prepared questions; we were chatting like old friends.

Working on The Oracle trained me to adapt quickly to change. On February 28, 2003, in the middle of our production period, a car driven by a former Gunn student struck six-year-old Amy Malzbender. I redesigned the front-page, the issue came out on schedule, and I received positive comments from friends. But the most poignant response was an unexpected email from someone I did not know. The writer of the message, who had known Amy, thanked me for my "sensitive coverage of Amy's passing." His brief words meant more to me than any page-long letter of praise. They made me realize why I stay in L-14 late into the nights.

It is not obligation, but love. Love springs open my eyelids every time they begin to droop on late nights in L-14. Love motivated me that December night -- ten thousand eight hundred heartbeats of it. And sometimes love makes me indulge in a dream: I imagine The Oracle in my hands transforming into the feminine figure of Pythia, the priestess who spoke the oracular prophecies. She is holding out a bowl of water, and in its depths I see myself a year from now -- scurrying to cover late-breaking news for my Stanford Daily editors.

# The Piano James Yang

## "A picture is worth a thousand words" as the adage goes. (You're limited to the space provided, however.) Attach a photograph (either online or hard copy with the paper application) no larger than 5 x 7 inches that represents something important to you, and explain its significance.

The announcer called my name.

I walked up to the stage towards the piano. My footsteps echoed like a metronome through the grand performance hall at the University of Georgia. I had woken up early that morning in January 2002 to spend a couple of hours warming up ahead of a competition for which I had spent the last six months preparing and dreading. I was representing the State of Virginia at the Southern Division of the National Baldwin Piano Competition. This was my first regional piano competition since I started playing the instrument at age three. I felt all of my life's work in music culminating in this defining moment. Such a burden rested heavily on my shoulders as I made my way across the large stage, feeling not ready at all, wishing I had more time to practice.

I felt the impatient stares and heard the obligatory clapping of the audience, and responded with a feigned smile and bow. I sat down on the uncomfortably hard bench and rubbed my sweat-drenched hands against my pants which made it even worse. My heart was beating audibly and my mind raced through all the piano lessons and all the hours of practice in a desperate attempt to remember everything. I noted how ridiculously cumbersome and restrictive my tuxedo and dress shoes felt. Despite my piano teacher's endless lectures on focus, I was decidedly unfocused. I brought my hands over the keyboard and held them there as I listened to the pounding of my heart - boom-boom - and pondered my eventual success or doom. Then, suddenly, my hands fell of their own will towards the keyboard.

The moment the first keys were depressed, the hammers struck the strings, which resonated with an intense beauty. The series of octaves at the beginning of Beethoven's Sonata in D Major served as a grand opening to my program. The world around me soon faded into blackness and I was alone with my piano. I became consumed in the playful staccatos, the heartbreaking leggieros, and the thundering climaxes of the music. My anxiety slowly faded as I eased into what I love - creating music. I became one with the emotional drama of the music, my fingers mere extensions of the keyboard. Nearing the end of my final piece, a Prokofieff Sonata, I suddenly broke away from my fantasy and eagerly anticipated the conclusion of my best performance yet. My mind was already racing ahead to what lay ahead - the awards announcements.

The sonata finished with a thundering fortissimo and the audience burst into applause. This time, I responded to the audience's enthusiasm with a genuine smile and bow. I walked off the stage to greet my parents. What followed was an agonizingly long wait for the remaining contestants to finish playing. All the while listening, I was silently critiquing their performances, feeling great about my near 'perfect' playing, and certain that I would come in at least as an alternate, if not a finalist.

When the awards finally came, I was stunned. I came in third. How could I only win third place? The question kept racing through my mind over and over again. Needless to say, I was disappointed. Why did I ever bother to compete?

As my mind slowly went over the day's events, I came to realize the superfluity of my performance anxiety. Sure, I like to win, but being a musician is much more than just winning competitions or gaining fame. It is about being able to savor a rare gift earned by years of practice and about spreading the joy of music to others. I had given my very best that day and I was honored to compete amongst the best of my peers. I left Georgia State University feeling humbled and yet victorious.

Since then, I have gone on to win numerous regional and national competitions. However, every time I walk up the stage, I think of Georgia, and I remember one of the greatest lessons of my life. And instantaneously, my performance anxiety disappears. In its place is a natural outflow of what I love - music, shared freely and abundantly with the audience. I no longer worry about the outcome - I just enjoy myself. Strangely enough, the less I worry about winning, the more I win. Of all the performances and competitions I've participated in, Georgia sticks in my mind as the most memorable.

Losing is not failing. It reveals and defines the self more so than winning ever could. To me, Georgia was what I needed to push me to the next level of musicianship.

# I'm No Buffy the Vampire Slayer Arielle Ring

## Personal Statement

A few years ago, USA Today named the star of "Buffy the Vampire Slayer", Sarah Michelle Gellar, the epitome of the modern feminist. Declaring "with her take-no-prisoners attitude...vampire-slaying Buffy Summers has become... a feminist hero who's smart, tough and self-reliant," the beautiful blonde was apotheosized by younger girls. When asked about feminism, she explained, "Feminism sort of has a negative connotation. It makes you think of women that don't shave their legs." Does Gellar consider herself a feminist? "I hate the word," she replied. Why is the public so uncomfortable with the word "feminism?" Society implores women to strive to be smart and strong, but to be too smart or too strong is discouraged. Instead, too many settle for being a "Buffy," a female with incredible potential kept in check by contemporary culture's definition of "woman."

Last year, one of my teachers cracked a sexist joke and I commented that I found it inappropriate. He informed me the class was "mature enough" for such content. After class ended, a male student rudely inquired, "Are you a feminist?" as if it were a disease. I immediately reverted to a defensive mode, feeling the burden to justify not only my opinions, but also the entire platform of feminism; for a moment, like Gellar, I did not want to associate myself with a term so disgraceful. Looking back on the incident, I wish I would have had the courage I now possess to defend my beliefs. I am willing to take the risk of standing up against a popular opinion if I do not believe it to be right.

Perhaps I illuminate the paradox many modern women face. On one hand, I embody the prototypical, devoted female, assuaging the plight of Romanian orphans and donating countless hours to the Second Harvest Food Bank of the Inland Northwest. Numerous local and national accolades verify my role as a nurturer and "do-gooder." But when I step into a cross-examination debate round where the object is to establish your case and tear apart the opposing side, I risk being considered too assertive, too aggressive, and too competitive, while all of these traits are seen as desirable qualities in my male opponents. Sadly, many believe that to be "feminine" one must remain passive, a role I refuse to accept.

Am I a feminist? If that means I take risks to make my convictions known and strive to be smart and strong, then people can call me that if society must label me. But feminism does not define who I am, it's merely a term to describe some of my principles. I do not advocate every issue grounded in the feminist agenda. Feminism neglects my passion for competition, my desire to enact change, and my love of history. Feminism fails to capture my compelling feelings on Weapons of Mass Destruction or on the high levels of poverty in my hometown of Spokane. No one term elucidates my fear of failure, nor my aspiration to transform others through journalism. Instead, feminism is just one of the many terms I use to express myself, and to differentiate myself from Buffy.

# "Welcome to Palestine" Arielle Ring

## SHARING INTELLECTUAL INTERESTS IS AN IMPORTANT ASPECT OF UNIVERSITY LIFE. DESCRIBE AN EXPERIENCE OR IDEA THAT YOU FIND INTELLECTUALLY EXCITING AND EXPLAIN WHY.

In the summer of 2000, my family traveled to Israel, the birthplace of my father. I performed my Bat Mitzvah, met relatives for the first time, and discovered my heritage in a new light. Yet, one distinct incident left the greatest impact. We were visiting the Masada, an extremely spiritual site to Judaism, symbolic of Jewish Resistance, when an Arab worker stealthily confronted me, and defiantly announced, "Welcome to Palestine." As a young, naive, Jewish-American girl, I was flabbergasted. After all, we were in the land of Israel. Somehow, I realized how those seemingly three innocent words were reflective of a great cultural conflict just below the surface. Within months, the simmering tensions exploded into the violent Intifada that continues to plague the nation. Those words, however, ignited my passion for international events, particularly ethnic conflicts. Inspired, I read Thomas Friedman's From Beirut to Jerusalem, a highly acclaimed book that examines both sides of the Middle East conflict. Now a Friedman addict, I closely follow his columns in the New York Times, as each tackles an issue with a balanced, encompassing approach.

# Into the Heart of Darkness Arielle Ring

## Describe a defining moment in your life.

As a sixth-grader obsessed with the Seattle Mariners, I read the newspaper only for the sports page. One morning, however, I came upon a special pullout section as I thumbed for my section. It was entitled "Into the Heart of Darkness," and I nearly skipped it as I had the hundreds that came before and after it. What caused me to linger on this section was the picture consuming most of the front page, a photo I will never forget. It was of a young boy in a tattered hat, his suffering evident from the meek, dark look in his eyes.

Provoked by the poignant image, I began reading the article detailing the horrendous conditions of Romanian orphans. Lacking adequate shelter, clothing, and medical supplies, they were preparing to face a tough winter. By the time I finished reading the article, goose bumps covered my body. I felt obligated to help, but the problem seemed too hefty and inevitable for a young girl to tackle. For a few weeks, the images and words haunted me as I continued my everyday life.

As the holiday season neared, my family continued the tradition of rolling beeswax candles for gifts. The idea occurred to my friend and I that we could sell these candles and donate the profits to charity. Helping Hearts, the business we developed out of this idea, raised over $10,000 for Romanian orphans over several years.

Perhaps I would have found ways to help the needy without reading "Into the Heart of Darkness" that morning. All I know is that the image of that boy moved something in me that I know will shape decisions for the rest of my life. Besides donating Helping Hearts proceeds to the orphans, I have also become a leader at the local Second Harvest Food Bank. In the coming years I will continue to help the needy in our community - both international and local - as best I can.

# Economic Theories Letitia Lew

## Sharing intellectual interests is an important aspect of university life. Describe an idea or experience that you find intellectually exciting, and explain why.

Paul Samuelson once told a joke about a physicist, a chemist and an economist who were stranded on an island with only a can of soup. The physicist suggested smashing it open with a rock, the chemist wanted to heat it with a fire, and the economist just said, "Let's assume we have a can-opener..."

The joke speaks to one of the main criticisms of economists: They're supposed to be out of touch with reality, making numerous, simplifying assumptions to qualify their models. This criticism fascinates me, for it challenges the very basis of economic theory.

In real life, after all, humans are not homo economicus and ceteris is not paribus. Thus, these assumptions appear to render economic models useless in practice.

Yet I feel that assumptions may be clarifying tools for economists, in the same way Occam used his Razor to cut out complexities and hypotheticals in arguments. Economists make assumptions because they do not, and cannot, take into account all possible factors. Some are irrelevant, some they do not know how to handle, and others are excluded because "the benefits of a more complete theory outweigh the costs of including them." (Coase) As Milton Friedman stated, "The more significant the theory, the more unrealistic the assumptions." Thus, assumptions are crucial because they clear away complicating factors which may detract from the model's significant conclusions. As such, the assumptions that make models simple compared with the complexity of reality, ultimately serve to purge the workspace, the "anvil on which intellectual positions are hammered out" (McFadden, 1997) free of unnecessary clutter.

# The Rose Distilled Letitia Lew

## Write a note to your future roommate relating a personal experience that reveals something about you.

Have you ever thought about having children? I've come to realize that most girls assume they will be mothers sometime in the nebulous future, but I used to be bewildered that my peers could say things like, "If I have a son, I'll name him Jude." Thoughts like that have never occurred to me, but I began penning my thoughts down in a burst of youthful feminism after reading "A Midsummer Night's Dream" when I was 14. 'Why do we yearn to be "the rose distilled"?'

Perhaps as the eldest of four siblings and nineteen squalling grandchildren, I grew up with an innate dislike of kids. I know this places me down there with cantankerous old men and evil minds plotting global enslavement, but I must have been really warped to sign up for a reading program with my classmates.

In retrospect, it wasn't absolute torture. The kids even seemed to enjoy my animated readings. But most of all, it was enlightening. In the middle of "Jack and the Beanstalk" I would digress into how deforestation is harming the Earth, which of course fell on uncomprehending ears. But here is the crux: it is precisely their lack of understanding which frustrates me. I wish they knew the wonders and complexities of our world, and everyone else is far more patient than I am.

I still avoid children in the mall and can only envision myself as a parent like James Mill, force-feeding my John Stuart out of a childhood. But if you do ever become a mother, I will recognize your nobility.

# Nikki in the Bubble Anonymous

## Talk about the meaning of any photograph.

As I watched my first black and white print slowly emerge from nothingness, the methodical ticking of the timer behind me, I smiled as a wave of excitement passed through me. Without thinking, I began to dance to the rhythm of the clock. From the moment I developed my first print, I have been captivated by photography: the smell of darkroom chemicals, the feel of a slippery print between my fingertips, and the way that the safelight makes everything look black and white, transporting me back in time to an old movie. After two years and hundreds of prints, I still do a little dance every time I watch a print materialize in the developer.

For me, manipulative photography is a unique and effective means of communication, a way to express my ideas and opinions about the world. I use "trick" photography techniques - including double-printing, superimposing negatives, dodging, and burning - as tools with which to transform my intangible ideas into concrete images. I approach my photography by first deciding upon a thought or feeling I want to express, or a statement that I want to make. I visualize the final picture, and work backwards to figure out how to create it.

I chose this picture of my six-year-old sister, Nikki, for two reasons. First, it demonstrates how much time and energy I devote to photography. More significantly, it exemplifies how I use photography to express abstract concepts visually. With this photograph, I am conveying my thoughts and feelings about the changing nature of growing up. Like most kids, I hear stories from my parents about the "good old days," where life was easy and kids were carefree. When I compare these stories to my life and other teenagers around me, it seems that we are growing up and maturing much faster. I see this already in my sister, who is only six. Living in a house with two teenage brothers, she has already started to move away from childhood. But she seems conflicted about this, desperately trying to balance her desire to be more "grown up" with a competing desire to retain her childlike nature. I, too, have a cautionary voice inside of my head. It reminds me, as I take on more and more academic and community responsibilities, to keep things in perspective, to remember to have fun, and to enjoy the lighter side of life.

It is this tension, this balance between maturity and childhood, seriousness and fun, that I was trying to capture with this photograph. I had a vision of my sister, Nikki, blowing bubbles, with an image of herself inside one of the rising bubbles. As she blows the bubbles upwards, symbolically pushing herself away from childhood into a more adult world, another part of her is reluctant to grow up. The juxtaposition of her concerned expression as she blows bubbles with her look of anxiety as she attempts to break out of the rising bubble serves to suggest this inner struggle. The image of her trapped in the bubble, frantically trying to escape, symbolizes the subconscious voice inside her head urging her not to grow up too fast, not to give up her innocent, playful side.

The technical process of transforming this idea into an actual photograph was a real challenge. I needed a picture of my sister blowing the perfect-sized bubble in a very specific position, with a facial expression that would indicate a feeling of angst and uncertainty. Not surprisingly, given that she is only six years old, it took almost a hundred pictures and the promise of chocolate chip cookies to get it just right. I also needed an image of Nikki crouching down, pretending to be stuck inside of a bubble, this time with an expression of panic. Another twenty-five pictures; more cookies. I then had to figure out how to print the two negatives taken under different lighting conditions on the same piece of paper, sized and aligned correctly, without losing print quality. I spent days attempting to create on paper exactly what was in my head. I made over thirty prints, but not one was quite right.

One Friday, after basketball practice, I asked my photography teacher for the darkroom key. After experimenting with a few new techniques and creating ten or so more failed prints, I still could not get it right. With the school now closed and all of the students and teachers gone, I decided that I would not leave the darkroom until I had perfected the photograph. On the twenty-first try, I slipped the still blank paper into the developer with anticipation and turned the timer to two minutes. As the rhythmic ticking of the clock echoed like a drum through the vast emptiness of the deserted school, I, alone in the darkroom, watched as the exact vision inside my head materialized on the paper. With a smile of relief and a sigh of accomplishment, I began my dance.

# Pain Dan Ackerman Greenberg

## We want to get to know you as well as we can. We ask that you use this opportunity to tell us something more about yourself that would help us toward a sense of who you are, how you think and what issues and ideas interest you most.

With the wind in my face, my half-zipped jacket flying behind me, I feel alive. I'm barreling down a powdery hill at a hundred miles per hour on my snowboard, carving turns, jumping over shrubs, alone in the woods on the back of the mountain, thinking I must be invincible. I look up and see that the thin trail turns sharply to the left. I think about slowing down, but I can't give up the speed. So I turn my face towards the wind and smile. The next thing I know I'm on my back, having slid thirty feet across ice that might as well have been concrete. I can't help but let a chuckle escape from my lips, and soon I am laughing to myself. However, I can't move a muscle in my right leg. Still, I'm alive, so I keep on smiling and shaking my head with astonishment at my stupidity. My friends soon catch up and ask, "Are you OK?" Smiling through the paralyzing pain, I say, "I'm fine." An hour later I'm lying facedown strapped to an icy metal gurney in the back of a helicopter on my way to the nearest hospital, though it turns out it's not too serious. Lying shirtless on the cold, wet gurney, the sound of the helicopter battering my eardrums, one thought goes through my head: "This is going to make a great story."

I am sharing this story because it reveals a lot about my personality. Having given a great deal of thought to why I react to pain in such a seemingly irrational way, I have realized that my laughter is more than just a bizarre character trait - it is a manifestation of the way that I approach life. I pride myself in being a generally determined and levelheaded person. I feel that in most difficult situations I have the strength of mind and the self-discipline to persevere, to find the opportunity hidden in the problem (e.g., my first helicopter ride). The fact that I often laugh when in physical pain reflects how I always try to make the best of every situation. My response to my friends' question stems from this same optimism. Saying that I am fine helps me keep perspective. From broken wrists to dislocated shoulders, to stitches on my forehead, to snowboarding injuries like this one, I am always able to muster up the strength to say, "I'm OK." It's not that I just say that I'm OK, though; I mean it. Deep down, I am confident that I will be able to overcome any pain or hardship that I have to face, that I will get through it by remaining positive.

I try to apply this way of thinking to more than just pain. One good example is my experience during last year's Track season. I had set specific personal goals that I was unable to meet because of a shoulder injury. Instead of getting discouraged, I used my injury as an opportunity to focus more on helping my teammates achieve their goals. Running alongside the track helping to inspire the rest of my team proved to be even more gratifying than if I had been able to run my own events well. And at the last meet of the year, when my Track coach walked over to me, put his hand on my shoulder, and asked me if I would be the team captain next year, it meant even more to me than if I had been able to perform well in my races.

Over the past four years, I have had a few serious sports injuries, and I can sincerely say that I reacted to each one with laughter. However, it's not that I consciously laugh at pain to make a statement about my life philosophy. Simply, I have reflected on this strange character trait and realized that my reaction to pain mimics the way I live my life - with optimism, self-reliance, and a smile. And if along the path, life places a stumbling block in front of me and I trip and fall, I know that I will be able to continue laughing.

# My Place in My World Anonymous

## How do you interact with your immediate world?

In a school as small as The College Preparatory School (CPS), I often joke that just from looking at someone's shoes, I can give his or her first and last name and favorite color. Obviously this is an overstatement, but the point is that my "world" is relatively small. I chose to go to CPS because I was hoping for a feeling of kinship and intimacy, a comfortable and open environment.

However, I quickly noticed that students had formed small social groups that did not interact with one another. The class felt divided, lacking the sense of community I was seeking. Worse, I found myself caught up in this mentality, a part of one of these small groups. I realized that I was adding to the social separation that had occurred. Disappointed with myself and determined to change the way I interacted with my classmates, I made a conscious decision to reach out to a wider group of people, to "become the change I wanted to see in my world."

Knowing that I couldn't change the class dynamic overnight, I decided to start small. About halfway through my freshman year, I organized a bowling party, hoping that it would be an opportunity for different groups of students in my class to interact with one another. I made fliers, organized carpools, and rented out part of the bowling alley. Almost three-quarters of the class came and bonded in a comfortable setting entirely unrelated to school. Though it was only a single event, I believe that it began the process of knocking down the barriers that developed during the first few months of school.

Building on the success of this bowling party, during my sophomore year, I enlisted a friend to help me create and organize a bowling class during "Intraterm," a week where the school offers a variety of non-academic classes. For months, we did fund-raising and financial planning so that we could hire a personal bowling instructor, rent the bowling alley for a week, and even buy two customized bowling balls for the winner of a tournament we set up. It was, for both of us, a rewarding accomplishment to set up one of the few completely student-run Intraterm classes. The true reward, though, was seeing how the class had brought together a variety of students. Everybody in the class - freshman, seniors, girls, boys, good bowlers and bad - left the week feeling as if we were all one big bowling family. By the end of the week, I realized that though it was rewarding to bowl a "turkey" (three strikes in a row), it was even more satisfying to watch the people in the class who had never bowled before getting lessons from those who had, and seeing their smiles as they got their first strikes.

Later that year I began to wonder if ping-pong could bring our school together like bowling had. I ran the idea past the Dean of Students, presented it to student council, and asked for funding for a ping-pong table. After almost a month of debate, the idea was approved and I bought the table. Within the first week, I set up a tournament, organizing the brackets so that athletes would have to set up tournament games with math whizzes, teachers with students, freshman with seniors. To my satisfaction, students not only connected to play their games, but also began to extend these new friendships beyond ping-pong. The table and tournaments had brought together students and faculty in a comfortable arena entirely unrelated to academics or the pre-existing groups.

Seeing how much impact these small projects had on the overall sense of community, I thought that I could accomplish even more by expanding my involvement in student government. Having been a freshman and sophomore class representative, this year I ran for student body president. My platform was to dedicate the student council to building a better community atmosphere, and to making life at CPS more enjoyable. I have since used my position as president to implement more substantial ideas aimed to accomplish these goals. The student council has improved CPS through a wide range of school-wide events and projects. For example, we organized a spirit rally; we have "Music and Food Days" at least once every week, where all students can eat lunch together and listen to music; and we are in the process of organizing an outside-of-school event where all students will be encouraged to go bowling or miniature-golfing, or watch a movie in a rented-out theater. Though we have not eliminated all of the cliques, from what I see, students are beginning to feel less like a high school and more like a family, and less like a high school.

Over the past four years, CPS has reinforced in me the value of a close community environment. The feeling of comfort I get from such an environment not only enhances my ability to thrive in a classroom setting, but also adds to the quality of my daily life. So even at a college where I can't know everyone's favorite color just from looking at their shoes, I know that I will continue to do my part to help create a strong community, whether it be in a dorm, on a sports team, or even in the class as a whole.

# Safeguarding Memories Rachael Ji Yoon Kim

## Common Application: Topic of Your Choice

Leaping over crooked crevices in the sidewalk, my childhood self hopped a few yards ahead of my grandfather. As I paused to scrutinize a colorful candy wrapper, the smell of melting sugar drifted from a small blue cart where an old woman flipped flat buns on a pan. Grandpa always bought two buns: one for him and one for me.

Not long before my fourteenth birthday, my grandfather was diagnosed with a severe case of Alzheimer’s, and shortly afterwards, he moved into a nursing home. Upon entering his room, I shouted “Hi Grandpa!”

Grandpa murmured, “Who are you?”

The next day, I bought two of the sweet buns Grandpa and I had enjoyed.

“Grandpa, do you want one of these?”

He paused, then said, “No. Who are you?”

Leaving the buns in the paper bag, I replied, “I’m Rachael, your granddaughter.”

Eyes widening, he gasped, “You have to get out of here; the communists are guarding this place!”

I explained, “No, the Korean War is over! You’re safe in America.” With a small sigh, I returned home for the day.

Now, after more than three years, Grandpa recognizes me when I step into his room. However, he cannot connect the round-faced child beside the bun cart to the person I am today. Once a memory slides past the grip of his mind, it can never return.

This troubling truth has motivated me to preserve the memories of others in my grandfather’s generation through the War Stories Project. A year after joining the volunteer effort, I have become the coordinator of the project. Fellow volunteers and I collect the experiences of World War II witnesses and collaborate with local colleges to produce a documentary and companion anthology for high school students.

While managing the project, I interviewed Holocaust survivor Bruno Bienenfeld, who unraveled the touching story of his childhood. In 1943, his family was taken to the Jasenovic concentration camp, where they were only given one piece of bread a day. But one day, he reached under his threadbare pillow and found another piece of bread. His mother said that it was an answer to his prayers. The young Bruno asked, “Are there Jewish angels?” His mother smiled and said, “There are angels for all people on earth.” Every day, Bruno found an extra bit of bread under his pillow, but after three hard months, his mother died, and the deliveries ceased. He told his father “The angel didn’t put the bread under the pillow tonight.” His father replied, “He was too busy taking Mom to heaven.”

Working with primary sources like Mr. Bienenfeld, I learn about World War II from the people who lived it. I also delegate tasks and teach volunteers how to search for and sort images to be used in the documentary. In addition to the responsibilities of coordinator, I have taken on the position of Fundraising Head for the project. Besides speaking publicly on behalf of the War Stories Project in fundraising efforts, I also burn the midnight oil writing letters to more than 200 corporations and local businesses, looking up addresses, and licking envelopes until my mouth goes dry.

Each year, more and more World War II veterans and Holocaust survivors pass away, and the loss of these valuable witnesses reminds me of the urgency to preserve their life stories. Just as Grandpa forgot eating sugar-filled buns with me, we can fail to remember what our world has endured. Whether the record of our past must serve as a lesson or reminiscence, we must look back at the path of our history before laying the cobblestones of the future.

# Color Guard Rachael Ji Yoon Kim

## Common Application: Please elaborate on one of your activities (extracurricular, personal activities, or work experience)(150 words or fewer).

I like to play with guns and knives.

It’s not what you think: I’m in color guard. Although events like the Virginia Tech incident have worsened the reputation of weaponry, color guard attempts to transform the traditional connotations of potentially harmful objects into an art form.

I’ve participated in this artistic and athletic manner of multi-tasking for three years, starting with flag and advancing to the weapon lines by mastering both rifle and saber. In the familiar settings of home and school, I’m your typical teenager. But at a guard show, I become a dazzling entertainer, a fluid dancer, a dexterous performer.

Crimson eye-shadow fans out over my lids, and a crown of twisting locks sits proudly on my head. Brilliant lights gush over the football field, our stage. Maneuvering through lines of gleaming instruments, I roll to the ground, quickly pick up a billowing flag, and spread its silk before me over the night sky.

# Poetry Rachael Ji Yoon Kim

## Please elaborate on one of your activities (extracurricular, personal activities, or work experience)

“Poetry is a packsack of invisible keepsakes.”

~ Carl Sandburg

It is impossible to convey the art of words with more words. Case in point: try to find another word for “salty.” It isn’t bitter; it isn’t sour; it’s salty. Likewise, the terms “diction” and “tone” do not even come close to expressing the actual feel of a poem. It is the inspiration behind the poem, and that only, which drives the very essence of verse.

Just as inspiration can produce poetry, poetry can produce inspiration. Each unforgettable experience during my high school years was made manifest in a poem, and like a little packsack, my poetry harbored my memories. My poetry class trained me to reflect on our world, humankind, and myself. In my backyard, I would often sit cross-legged for hours, absorbing passing autumn breezes and hearing the twitter of sparrows in the sycamores. Homework had never been so enjoyable.

During my junior year, I led the annual winter and Valentine’s poetry seminars. As a veteran of the poetry class, I mentored many of the Poetry I students, urging my “mentees” to maintain open minds. At the end of the year, my fellow students and I held a “Readings and the Redwoods” event, except now we were not only the performers, but also the coordinators. At the start of my senior year, the Poetry Club I had founded became an official school club, which gave me the opportunity to invite several prominent contemporary poets, such as Poet Laureate Robert Hass, to our school. In addition, our club brought what we’d learned to the rest of the community, teaching our area youth about poetry.

Through every success and every disappointment, poetry has recorded my thoughts onto paper. A composer arranging each individual note, poetry has orchestrated my high school experiences into one resonating composition, bringing all of my memories together. When I want to look back at those memories, all I have to do is open my packsack of poetry, and listen.

# To my future roommate Rachael Ji Yoon Kim

## Write a note to your future roommate that reveals something about you or that will help your roommate--and us--know you better.

There is something about me that I feel obligated to warn you of, something that may or may not surprise, alienate, or even horrify you. I’m an addict—hopelessly addicted to words. I thought you should know.

Due to this constant craving, you may often find me merrily munching on the contents of a poetry book, or timing myself in an intense game of speed scrabble (my record best word is “pretzel”). If you’d like to join me, you’re quite welcome; my addiction includes chatting with people.

As I am an individual with idiosyncrasies, there are some things that irk me. Straw wrappers and mini orange juice cartons cluttering the floor are among my greatest pet peeves. My roommate at Johns Hopkins ran on orange juice. Without her juice, she was like an un-oiled Tin Man. However, she always threw away her juice packaging and straws—on the floor. Naturally, when I walked around our room, little plastic straw wrappers stuck to my socks. Trust me, I’m an avid supporter of Vitamin C. Nevertheless, I enjoy sanitation and neatness.

Have you seen the Broadway musical “Wicked”? Galinda identifies her roommate Elphaba as “unusually and exceedingly peculiar and altogether quite impossible to describe.” You may find that Elphie and I share many traits. For one, I like to collect people’s hair—long hair, and lots of it. I’ve been a “Locks of Love” donor, volunteer, and fundraiser for the past three years (inspired by my grandma’s cancer ordeal). I enlist salons across the nation to save clients’ hair to be revitalized on the heads of children suffering from medical hair loss. I also like to whistle Christmas carols throughout the year; December is the one month when people don’t give me funny looks. Shouldn’t every season be a “season to be jolly”?

All right, you’ve been warned.

# The Game of America's Game Anonymous

## Write about yourself.

I’ll admit it: I’m obsessed with fantasy football. I can vividly remember the call I received from “Pepe” (aka Colin) asking if I wanted to come to his “fantasy football” draft that night. Of course, being a 7th grader, I had never heard of the game that has since spread like wildfire all over the country, and I immediately thought of wizards and unicorns commonly found in books under the fantasy genre. Knowing a good friend of mine wouldn’t call me over to waste time dealing with wizards and unicorns playing football, I googled fantasy football to get some background information on this weird little game I was about to begin. It eventually occurred to me that fantasy football was simply a football fan’s way of getting further engaged in the sport; and it was, simply, an activity that provided a football season’s worth of entertainment.

Five years and countless hours later, I find myself becoming extremely anxious for the end of summer. For one, I’ve found incredible enjoyment in the competition found in fantasy football. There is nothing better than dominating my friends in something related to one of my favorite sports. It’s not that I love being better than everyone, it’s just I always love good competition, win or lose, and fantasy football always provides that. For example, taking down the league leader after picking up Earnest Graham was an extremely satisfying moment of the previous season.

Contrary to America’s belief, I’ve determined through “sophisticated” statistical analysis that numbers do actually matter in fantasy football. This game cannot be won simply with gut feelings, but rather complex analysis of each player’s situation and ability. I’ve found myself up late on some summer nights forming spread sheets that plotted the previous year’s projected rankings vs. the actual points, which helped me determine exactly how accurate the “expert” predictions were. I eventually found after the top few picks or so, the difference between the 7th and the 10th ranked player, for example, was so unpredictable you could easily draft either one and still have the same success. Maybe next year’s AP Stats class will help me dig even deeper into this wonderful sport.

Most of all, fantasy football is downright fun. All of this competitive nature and fun also helps solidify friendships and provides memorable times for both my friends and family. I’ll never forget those weekend morning conference calls with the entire Diekroeger family calling in from around the country yelling at each other after the team right before them took their biggest sleeper in the draft. (I wonder if I’ll have to help Uncle Steve get his system working again this year), And the same group that initially showed up to that mysterious “fantasy football” draft back in 7th grade will still meet at the end of this summer. Thanks to this wonderful interest of mine, I can count on being told by Pepe that the team I just drafted is horrendous, only for him to be humbled by the fact that I stand above him at the end of the season.

# Jan the Troubadour Anonymous

## It responds to the quote:"Destiny is no matter of chance. It is a matter of choice. It is not a thing to be waited for, it is a thing to be achieved." -William Jennings BryanDo you agree with this quote? What experiences have you had that seem to reinforce the above (or render it completely false)?

Three months into my exchange year in Germany, my friend called me, a little dejected. She wanted to go downtown, and it was clear why. There was still something incredibly rousing, mysterious, and exciting about the European city that had recently become our home. Even as the weather cooled and the throng of people thinned, something drew us to its center, Schlossplatz (Castle Square), our thinking being that the myriad of as yet unseen faces and the layering of voices might call us out of a slightly less exciting day-to-day existence and present us with some small adventure. Kafka once wrote in his diary, “Life’s splendor forever lies in wait about each one of us in all its fullness, but veiled from view, deep down, invisible, far off… If you summon it by the right word, by its right name, it will come.” Going to the city was our clumsy way of tugging at the veil, or maybe it was the hope that the right word would be whispered to us there.

On that night we were lucky. We met someone we believed had pulled off that veil. His name was Jan; he was perched on a stone between two buildings, singing his heart out. It was fascinating. Of course, street singers were nothing new—but usually their profession was a last resort, and it showed. Jan was different; he was talented, spirited, well-dressed, clean. His eye wasn’t glued to his guitar-case, which was glittering with more than just a few two-Euro pieces. People gathered around him, wide-eyed, smiling. He was an under-cover pop star and the tickets were free. Soon he announced that he’d had enough and it was time for a coffee. The audience had dwindled to my friend and I, and some old man babbling about Hollywood. We landed in “Café du Théatre” and waited for exotic anecdotes. Jan told us about his life and what had brought him to the city. He’d followed love there but lost it soon after. Why did he sing in the streets at night? Because he was a poet born in the wrong century. We didn’t think to ask what he did during daylight, how he lived, and where. He was a real renegade. Soon the last trains were leaving. The three of us skipped through the wide, empty street, singing with an abandon that one doesn’t find in the suburbs, “Que sera, sera.”

At the train station, no promises were made, no numbers exchanged, no plans for next week emerged. My friend and I headed back to our side of town, pleased and exhilarated with the tiny adventure just given us by the generous gods of youth. We soaked up enchanting personalities, added them to our database entitled “The Richness of Life” and clicked the “save” button. We didn’t expect to see Jan again.

My exchange year continued in monotone. Winter brought on bouts of a certain pervasive drabness, periods in which I would measure the progress my heart had made on the continuum of time. I wanted change, but I didn’t know how to entice it. There was a foggy desire for a catalyst, an explosive event that would change me, that would mark the dazzling appearance of “real life.”

One day, passing Schlossplatz, I spotted a small crowd of people and, floating above it, was the vigorous voice of Jan. The gods of youth had dropped him in my lap again. With him were three punks, a business man, and a Turkish man who, though unable to understand the lyrics of his music, was dazzled, and rocked, eyes closed, from side to side in front of the singer.

It seemed as if the universe placed Jan in my path just at the moment I most needed him. Jan was less a person than a symbol for me, a sign from the stars that “the real” wasn’t far away. Singing in the streets with him was a strange sort of communion. I was getting closer. I was dreaming of a beautiful youth, filled with brilliant anomalies and bursts of light.

Nearing the end of the year, I returned to have a look at the city where I had spent so much time, the city that housed so many moods and revelations for me. I also wanted to bid Jan farewell, but he was nowhere to be found. I hardly understood it. Jan had to be there; it simply couldn’t be otherwise. Didn’t he realize that it was a fateful day, that this really was the last time we would see each other? And then it hit me, poignantly, something I’d been learning the duration of my exchange year—if I wanted something to happen, I would have to take responsibility for it. This was the border between childhood and adulthood, between a magical view of the world, filled with faith and expectation, and an adult one. Of course Jan wasn’t there. I hadn’t called him: I didn’t even have his number. Fate wasn’t watching over me, sending me everything I needed and the cues to search for the rest. The age of troubadours was over.

I suddenly remembered the other part of the story that Jan had told that first night at the Café du Théatre—that he was far from reaching his dreams; in the evening, he sang his heart out, but in the daytime, he was a mechanic, dirtying his musician’s hands with grime, oil and tears.

Recalling Kafka, I understood something: Life’s splendor was still attainable, but I could no longer naively rely on circumstance. Indeed, I had to become “the summoner.” I had to begin to perceive my freedom as responsibility.

# Running Kimberly P. Huynh

## What makes Stanford a good place for you?

Running and I have a complex relationship. Despite the exquisite torture of sprinting two miles around and around in a circle, feeling as if both lungs have collapsed and death by dehydration is imminent, it is unlikely we’ll ever break up: I had never felt so keenly the very throbbing of being until I was flying around that track. Running has taught me to trust myself, to breathe deeply, and to endure. If five, six, seven miles are manageable, so are school and work and sleepless nights. To Running I owe my curiosity, my impulse to explore an unknown road or a novel subject and see where feet and heart and mind will lead.

Running and I, we belong at Stanford. 8,180 acres is more than enough for us to cover and academically speaking, our spirit of exploration translates well. With the Farm’s strong emphasis on interdisciplinary programs, undergraduate research and its bevy of exceptional resources, I’ll blow with the wind, combining my passions for the humanities with my interests in medicine. I hope to spark lively debate in small-group courses, amble thoughtfully through the Rodin Sculpture Garden, and laugh helplessly over marching band antics. My name would be on the roster of Pi Beta Phi, the Archery and Badminton Clubs, and Arabesque Middle Eastern Dance. I look forward to immersing myself in the eight million volumes of Stanford’s twenty libraries, delving backwards into the whys and wherefores of literature and history with professors like Jack Rakove and Gordan Chang, and propelling forward onto the very forefront of neurological and dermatological research. Stanford offers its undergraduates a freedom no other school can quite match, and the possibilities for growth and exploration, for running further and effecting change are endless, in every direction.

# Remix Anonymous

## Topic of your choice.

I sat down on the bench, apprehensive. I hadn’t touched the ivory keys in almost eight years. Instead, I had actively avoided them, treasuring instead the strings of my violin. In debates I claimed that it was harder to play my instrument, belittling the plunking keys. Yet now I found myself seeking the power of the piano again, wanting music that was its own partner.

I began by sounding out the melody with my right hand. As the silky notes glided through the silence, I was reminded of my violin.

This is where I belong. I am a violinist, a purveyor of sweet melodies. This was where I took tentative steps away from the strict notes and rhythms I had adhered to as a young pianist, as I discovered that music comes from the emotions spiraling from the thin black lines. On the violin, I can close my eyes, enthralled by the music, exploring to match the compositions racing through my head. I have spent Friday nights improvising with pianists, cellists, guitarists -- whomever I can find. I have been a street musician, spreading the joy that I already give myself. The first time I wandered downtown, I gathered a motley group of an accordionist and a cellist. We unpacked in an alley between two quaint cafes, away from questioning eyes, amidst the pink daisies of early spring. As we emerged onto the sidewalk, a chilling wind raced against our dancing fingers, countering the warmth of the afternoon sun settling on our skin. And we played. Passersby -- a wrinkled man, a dancing little girl, a gangly preteen -- stopped and stared, occasionally leaving spare change in exchange for the smiles that sprouted on their faces. As our improvisations managed to cut into their everyday lives -- lives that had been absorbed in their separate paths -- I found a pastime in the streets. The purity of a melody slicing through the air simply cannot be underestimated.

Yet as the notes swelled throughout the room, I heard the force of the piano. There was no violin. Instead, I switched to the lower line of the music. The notes of the left hand outlined a beat that matched the sound of the drums.

A year ago, a friend gave me his old drumsticks. I immediately raced to the old drum set in the student center to start banging away. Fortunately, no one was around to hear me miss beats and drop my sticks. I was playing as a violinist, not a drummer, without resolving the two instruments. My initial attempts occurred at 6:00 AM to hide behind the solitude of the sleeping campus. Eventually, my confidence, if not my skill, progressed to allow early arrivals to hear my offbeat screeches.

Yet I heard the smoothness between the piano’s consistent beat. There were no drums. Together, my two hands created the perfect harmonies of the barbershop quartet I had started a year ago, born from a friendship formed in a theory class. We began by wandering around the school at lunchtime, singing our separate ways, until the next bell rang to shoo us off to class.

But here the music will not end. As I began to deviate from the sheet music in front of me, I knew that I could delight in my right hand as long as my left hand stayed steady. The piano was only a remix, a compilation, of what I had done before. In time, my playing of the piano came into its own, becoming a springboard in itself to bigger and better things.

# The Unspoken Words Anonymous

## Virtually all of Stanford's undergraduates live on campus. Write a note to your future roommate that reveals something about you or that will help your roommate - and us - know you better.

Dear Future Roommate,

I have never told my sister that I love her.

Growing up, it was not part of our culture -- in our traditional Chinese family, my mother still believes that women belong in the home. There are no hugs or kisses. We respect each other’s space, so a farewell is simply a spoken word, without tears or touch.

But that is merely an excuse for my fear. I can tell a stranger that I love her, and social propriety will require her to repeat the sentiment. There are no such restrictions between sisters.

I have always looked up to my sister despite her introversion. She is my oracle, my guiding force in my life. Still, I know that it is up to me to reach out first.

Yet my previous ventures have been failures. At her graduation, I bounced up to fawn over her glory. I threw a casual arm around her for a picture, almost inducing a hug -- until she pulled away from my grasping touch. There is my fear, carved by the pixels of a snapshot.

So I will start our relationship with honesty. I will tell you how much I adore you, because I know the fun we will have dancing and singing around our room. I will say the word “love”, and I will not let fear get in the way.

Sincerely,

[NAME]

# A Two-sided Coin Anonymous

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

I often think of my home country, Vietnam, as a coin factory. At this factory, day in and day out, coins march in assembly lines out of metal strips in perfect conformity. I am just such a coin, minted in 1993, rimmed, polished, annealed, and finally stamped. But I am a defective coin: I am different from the rest. How? As a child, I questioned prevalent Vietnamese customs and beliefs, thereby distancing myself from these cherished traditions and my compatriots who upheld them. I felt out of place.

As a prime example, I challenged the Vietnamese “superstition” regarding “Tao Quan” -- the Kitchen God. My parents constantly reminded me that on the 23rd day of the twelfth lunar month, just before Lunar New Year, the Kitchen God flies to Heaven on a holy carp to report the past year’s activities in every household to “Ngoc Hoang” -- the Jade Emperor. Based on Tao Quan’s report, the Jade Emperor in Heaven would either reward the household with good health, fortune, and abundant wealth or punish it severely. And so, in my youth, my mother often told me to behave lest the Jade Emperor penalize me for my wrongdoings.

Nevertheless, I saw no evidence that supported such beliefs. As a curious kid with aspirations to become a scientist one day, I persistently posed questions about the subject. However, I was always disappointed by the superstitious responses that my grandfather, my mother, and my teachers provided. Consequently, I turned to the modest collection of books that my parents could afford to provide me. These readings, under cover of which I could indulge safely in my long-established passion for science, sated my desire for explanations for why people around me practiced their traditions.

In particular, when I came across a book titled Emics and Etics: The Insider/Outsider Debate, I realized how wrong I was to be biased. I was an insider who critically analyzed customs without considering their role as a structural element of society. As I took a step back and viewed traditions from both an emic and an etic perspective, I saw the big picture more clearly. I saw the two sides of traditional practices. Empirically and sociologically, they may have lacked a scientific foundation; nevertheless, they have an indispensable function in my society. Vietnamese customs may seem illogical to Western science, but from an appreciative anthropological viewpoint, these traditions serve as a spiritual means through which my country’s people express themselves. I finally came to realize that when my family gathered around in a cozy, incense-filled little room to write down all of our mistakes during the past year. We were seeking mutual forgiveness, thus looking to start the New Year on a clean slate.

That was when I became aware that there are always two sides to everything: heads and tails, rationality and irrationality, my strong bias for scientific evidence and my parents’ unquestioning belief in tradition. This undeniable fact will forever remain a constant. However, I have learned that our world is continuously changing at an unparalleled rate; the one-sided “either/or” thinking that worked in the past now no longer suffices. Instead, I know I must learn to reconcile both sides of the coin. Only in this way can I understand everything in the larger sphere of human knowledge, rather than through one narrow lens.

When I reconciled both sides of my own coin, allowing myself to remain loyal to science and the principle of sufficient reason while still enjoying traditional customs with my friends and family, I let the two seeming contradictories harmonize into a new mindset -- one that, in the words of F. Scott Fitzgerald, can “hold two opposing ideas in mind at the same time and still retain the ability to function.” And with this new mindset, I now seek to combine and not divide. I seek to pursue interdisciplinary studies, not disciplinary education. These are my enticements, and they will suffice to help me through every walk of life, to partake and thrive in any community that encourages conversing across cultures and disciplines. Every coin has a story. I hope that mine will tell both sides of it.

**Being Shy Timothy Wong**

**Virtually all of Stanford’s undergraduates live on campus. Write a note to your future roommate that reveals something about you or that will help your roommate—and us—know you better.**

As a young boy I was always shy. I didn’t have very many friends aside from my one best friend, Christophe. Though most kids considered me quiet, with my best friend, I was silly, fun loving, and even charismatic. Growing up in a community that is 94% white, being Asian instantly set me apart from the rest of the students. Being cast aside because of my race hurt me at first; however, over time, this feeling of distinctiveness gave me the drive to prove I was as good as everyone else. Because of this, I learned to push myself and to achieve my goals. Even as a young student in fourth grade, I worked hard on my math booklets and always finished before the rest of the kids. This made me realize that I actually didn’t want to be exactly like everyone else: I wanted to excel, and therefore I wanted to be different.

In sixth grade, I changed school districts and was forced to make new friends. I thought this would be a challenge; however, I began to see it as an opportunity to make a new impression on my peers. I made another best friend, Jake, who introduced me to many other friends. From Jake, I learned the social skills I lacked at my old school, and I could more easily interact with my classmates. Instead of being “the Asian kid,” I was suddenly just Tim, the sixth grader. However, I still knew that I was different from everyone else, and that idea always stayed with me.

Throughout middle school and high school, I have been able to accomplish much academically, which would not have been possible without my cultural background pushing me through each step. I wanted to fit in, yet I was okay with being different. I expect that paradox to continue during my years at Stanford, and that I will only become more comfortable with it as time goes on. Being Asian American has shaped who I am and always will.

**Ukulele Timothy Wong**

**What matters to you and why?**

What is the world without music? Is it silent? Is it still? It is empty. As a child, I desired to have a musical outlet but struggled in finding an instrument that suited me. Throughout my four years of piano lessons, I enjoyed the playing, yet I lacked the skill necessary to excel. I couldn’t focus and practice because this instrument did not grasp me. This experience brought me to try violin, and I soon found again that it was not for me either. I found that this type of music bored me, and it was not what I was searching for. I wanted something different and unique.

In 2010, I bought my first ukulele on Amazon and taught myself how to play through online lessons. Within two weeks, I could perform nearly every song I came across. It wasn’t until that first strum on my very first ukulele that I realized how important music is in our lives. I had a new understanding not only of music, but also of myself. I found the reason I wanted to play music and enjoy it: music strongly contrasted my academic life with something that I loved doing. When my mind is full of equations I know I can sit in my room and play Jack Johnson or Taylor Swift until my stress is gone. Through ukulele, I’ve also gained confidence that I never had. I wanted others to be able to appreciate music the way I did, so I decided to perform in my high school’s talent show. I was nervous, yet I managed to steady my fingers enough to play the desired chords. That night I felt proud of myself, but it wasn’t because of how well I played, but rather because I felt accomplished.

My ukulele gives me an outlet that allows me to escape reality and put feelings into tangible sounds. As I play in my room, strum a tune, pick a playful melody, or challenge myself with more difficult pieces, I find joy in the feelings my ukulele brings. Music has given me a chance to come out of my shell and will continue to be an important aspect of my life.

# Against the Odds Anonymous

## Topic of your choice.

Unlike most children, I loved the doctor. As I bubbled after hearing the news of a doctor's appointment, I'd begin preparing a list of questions. At the clinic, the nurses laughed at me, but I was determined to get to the bottom of my quest of how to become a doctor. By accompanying me through obstacles in life, my quest for scientific education has helped me persevere to achieve my goals.

As a child in Pakistan, I lived in an environment that did not agree with my passion. As a young girl, my job was to help out at home while the boys ran the errands outside. I made the observation that boys and girls were treated differently. More significantly, girls were not expected to excel academically. To compound this, I realized that the financial conditions of our fathers determined our futures—even if we were all boys. My hypothesis was seemingly true when I realized that none of my female cousins attended college. I concluded differently for myself. I could not adjust to this and decided that I would be a fabulous and intelligent doctor that would one day be famous worldwide. I was neither financially gifted nor a boy, but I could be just as successful if I studied diligently. My passion for science and mathematics became of second nature to me. I read every book I could get my hands on, and my determination grew stronger.

Moving to the USA made my dream much more realistic. However, when we first moved, we had no home and no jobs. We did not speak English. We spent our first few months in the basements of relatives. I stayed silent during my first days of school because I did not know English. Moreover, my parents did not allow me to try speaking English at home in order to preserve our native language. Therefore, some days I came in to school completely embarrassed of having done the homework incorrectly. I often cried when the teacher yelled at me, but I never complained that my parents could not help me. I never left anything incomplete, always attempting everything with my best effort. Determined to excel, I began practicing my English in solitude with books and by watching television. I requested that my cousins to speak to me in English rather than Urdu in order to improve my understanding. After multiple tries, I eventually mastered assignments. I developed as a scholar and became a perseverant person.

I knew that I had to learn English to study medicine, and my dedication to overcoming difficulties allowed me to quickly adjust to the American education system. Adversity was not a dead end, but a learning experience that made me stronger. Therefore, my love of science encouraged me to take initiative for myself. I highly value education because I have a simple logic: increase in education increases the potential to help myself and others. My passion for science and education has always driven me to persevere.

# Experience Anonymous

## What matters to you, and why?

My next target is the mailman.

I wait patiently as he draws near—I am prepared. A few minutes later, he hands me a dollar in exchange for a cup of lemonade.

Mission accomplished.

I have always been fascinated by the business world. To me, nothing could be simpler: a company sells, a consumer buys, and money is exchanged. Hence, when my mom offered me work at her company, I was eager to take the job.

But once my first day ended, I realized how mistaken I had been. Shipping a single product, let alone the thousands that come in an order, requires a complex six-step process—a task that certainly opened my eyes.

As the shock receded, I gradually adapted to the life of a businesswoman. My responsibilities include, among others, computer work, contract negotiations, and factory runs on another continent. From marketing company products to finalizing my fourth patent, I’ve learned that business is more than just buying, selling, and crunching numbers—it’s also the art of inventing, persuading, and marketing yourself and your company to potential buyers. While traveling for business, I’ve encountered odd clients, picky terms, and countless people.

This work has allowed me to hold in high regard the value of first-hand experience. I began this journey with misconceptions; however, by actually doing the job, I understood how the real world operates, learning far more than any course could teach me.

I recently met with ShopNBC’s Eric Gangl and introduced to him my company’s products. Within fifteen minutes, Eric put in an order for all of our top products—the first of many successes, I hope.

This experience and many others like it have taught me valuable lessons, ones that I certainly couldn’t have gleaned without getting hands-on. Now, before I judge a person, criticize a food, or underestimate the skill that is needed in a certain job, the following comes to mind: have I met the person, tasted the food, or done the job? Because only then can I speak truthfully.

# The Roommate Quiz Caitlin Tran

## Virtually all of Stanford's undergraduates live on campus. Write a note to your future roommate that reveals something about you or that will help your roommate -- and us -- know you better. (250 word limit.)

TAKE THE ONE QUESTION ROOMMATE QUIZ TO SEE IF WE’RE COMPATIBLE!

Your ideal roommate is similar to you because she:

a) is an athlete who loves waking up for early morning runs and lives for her next adrenaline rush.

b) likes drinking hot chocolate and watching Netflix while curled up under a blanket on a Friday night.

c) always knows what and when fun things are happening whether it’s a free concert or football game.

d) has tried to DIY everything from quilts to websites to ice cream.

e) may not be Tina Fey, but will do anything to make you smile on a bad day.

f) does crossword puzzles in pen and makes personality quizzes for fun.

RESULTS ANALYSIS BELOW

If you chose any of the above: You’re in luck! Any and all of the choices listed describe me. We seem to have at least one thing in common already, and for the next year we’ll be having at least one more—our room. Full disclosure: I have been known to snore and sleepwalk. Even worse, I’m a below average cook. However, I do have a Costco membership with perks I will gladly share with you!

If none of the choices appealed to you: Don’t be too worried. There’s a lot more to me than the six choices listed and we have all year to get to know each other. For now though: my name is Caitlin and I can’t wait to meet you!

# The Joy of the Pen Caitlin Tran

## What matters to you, and why? (250 word limit.)

On Sunday nights, I take out my favorite fountain pen and write letters. The letters vary by week. Sometimes I use store bought stationery; other times my words are casually scrawled on index cards. The recipients vary, too. Many have received letters from me before, but it is common for the addressees to be letter-from-Caitlin virgins.

This tradition started when I received my first letter of the not Happy Birthday or Merry Christmas variety. The second day at a conference, I was slipped a small envelope by a new friend. The message was brief and seemingly trivial, but the gesture resonated with me. Here was somebody who thought of me and went through the effort to put it on paper. Suddenly, I no longer felt alone in a place where, previously, I had felt very alone.

I returned home, inspired, and began writing to the people in my life. Events from a friend passing her driving test to a teacher whose class I enjoyed were recognized and their responses were gratifying. Like me, they appreciated the effort a letter signified. The act is a reminder that they are significant in somebody else’s life. We are all connected and our cumulative actions will shape the future of our world. Letters, I was told by my crying school crossing guard, bring hope and nothing is more powerful than hope. If a simple thing like a few kind words can mean so much, I don’t think my tradition will ever die.

# Winstagram Anonymous

## Stanford students possess an intellectual vitality. Reflect on an idea or experience that has been important to your intellectual development. (250 word limit.)

Among the candid celebrity shots and photogenic pets, one aspect of Instagram has always intrigued me: the Popular page—a continuously changing mosaic of current top posts. After checking the page, I often wondered what made those photos so special that they were shown on all 150 million users’ screens. Impulsively, I made it a goal to be featured. I, an unfamous teenager from the suburbs, wanted to crack the system.

The following three months were the beginning of an experiment on how one joins the ranks of the "rich and famous" of the Instagram world. Combing hourly through the list and taking note of patterns, I realized two key facts. First, pages featured had lots of active followers. Second, followers had to interact with the photos through comments or “likes” to be considered active. With that in my mind, I created a specialty account—a page devoted to nail art, a niche subject with a passionate fanbase. Besides featuring my own admittedly mediocre work, it would be a highlight page that spotlighted other (more talented) artists, too.

That summer was my crash course in marketing. Through trial and error, I learned the importance of concepts like hashtagging, brand image, and content curation. Ultimately, my account acquired over 17,000 followers and was featured on the Popular page multiple times. Most importantly, though, were the greater implications of achieving my goal. I had empowered myself to reach something that once felt unattainable. The improbable has turned possible and, thenceforth, I would never limit my goals again.

# The "Unsolvable" Cube Brandon Joshua Dixon

## The essay demonstrates your ability to write clearly and concisely on a selected topic and helps you distinguish yourself in your own voice. What do you want the readers of your application to know about you apart from courses, grades, and test scores? Choose the option that best helps you answer that question and write an essay of no more than 650 words, using the prompt to inspire and structure your response. Remember: 650 words is your limit, not your goal. Use the full range if you need it, but don't feel obligated to do so. (The application won't accept a response shorter than 250 words.)

Wedding bells were ringing in the background, and my fingers were deftly picking their way through the Rubik's Cube concealed under my blazer. The last wedding I had attended was in fourth grade -- a bubble boy in a lavender suit**.**Today, my only role was to behold my two favorite teachers as they got married.

Except, I couldn't quite focus on their wedding. Clack Clack Clack went the cube as I spun through an algorithm that my Algebra teacher (the bride) had taught me. My mother bristled beside me, but I cared not for her disapproval. My Algebra teacher and her fiancé, my Physics teacher, had given me my first Rubik's Cube, and I was hell-bent on solving it.

They would often be the sponsors of my obsessions throughout my high school career. Before the Rubik's Cube, I had taken up YuGiOh cards. After school I would hike to their classrooms and play against upperclassmen duelists. At first I couldn't beat any of them, and my Physics teacher (whose seemingly vitriolic banter was aimed at trying to encourage my growth) reminded me of those defeats daily**.**It wasn't long before I was good enough with YuGiOh cards that I could defeat almost every other duelist in the school, except for one senior who brutally eviscerated me with her skills. Till this day I have never managed to beat her.

Eventually, my Physics teacher suggested that I try my hand at something else**.** He ducked into the storage room adjacent to his classroom and returned with a box full of dusty Rubik's cubes. He looked straight into my eyes and said "I bet you won't be able finish one of these," before thrusting the box into my hands. He knew that I relish the idea of a challenge and excel in instances when someone tells me I cannot accomplish a goal. "Bad bet," was my response.

So ensued months of interminable hours spent probing the cube, trying to coerce it into its solved position. I fumbled with it during meals, after studying, and while walking home from school. I surrendered myself to trying to solve the Rubik's Cube, but it seemed like no matter how many times I came close to solving it, I could never get the colors to fall into neat, orderly rows.

The morning of the wedding, I woke up determined to complete the cube before the ceremony ended. I snatched the cube off of my dresser and began to work, but no matter how furiously I tried to cajole the cube into solving itself, it continued to twist into infuriatingly random assortments of colors.

As the ceremony started, my attempts became more frantic. Eventually, I diverted my eyes completely and focused on the cube. I probably would have grappled with it right through the end of the wedding, had it not been for an interruption by my senior rival. She sat down next to me, plucked the cube from my fingers, twisted one row into place and then solved the Cube within 30 seconds of elegant finger work. She gave me an amused smirk and slapped a note into my hand. When I glanced at it, I saw that it was from my Physics teacher, telling me that he had deliberately sabotaged the cubes so that they would be unsolvable, regardless of if I used the correct algorithms. He had purposefully given me an unreachable goal, simply to see if I would give up.

"Sometimes the odds are stacked against you. But with that amount of perseverance you might just find a way to win even when it seems impossible," said my Physics teacher after pulling me aside the next day. Life is full of potentially insurmountable challenges. My experience with the "seemingly unsolvable" Rubik's Cube galvanized my drive to tackle the impossibilities in life and transform them into opportunities, to face the barriers that only hard work can overcome.

# my dreams Anonymous

## 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 your thoughts and express yourself. We are looking for an essay that will help us know you better as a person and as a student.

Most kids obtain the same eye color or a few facial features from their parents, yet I've acquired substantially more: an unquenchable enthusiasm for technology. My dad, an electrical designer, taught me to investigate the world with curious eyes, continually trying to take in more, to see more. I watched him for quite a long time as he took a shot at lift schematics at home, pondering what all the different images and lines implied. I was interested by innovation and needed to know how and why things functioned the way they did.

"How does this toaster function?" "What's inside this VCR?" I was perpetually discontented with the streamlined answers that my guardians here and there provided for these inquiries. So I found numerous responses for myself by investigating and testing.

My play area was a muddle of old circuit sheets, saved electric wire, and a grouping of broken apparatuses. I invested hours dismantling and tinkering with the fortune of devices I discovered lying around our carport. My mom, a first grade educator, saw my scholarly interest and energized my youth investigations. She gave me heaps of brain-opening kids' books, which I readily read. Books like "What Makes Popcorn Pop, and Different Inquiries Concerning Our General Surroundings" permitted me to find the powerful offer of innovative inquiries and their intriguing answers.

I was given an exceptional measure of opportunity at a youthful age. When I was 6, my parents purchased an old PC for $25 from a neighborhood yard deal with the aim of giving me a chance to freely experiment on it. I was excited. Spurred by interest, I dug into it immediately and figured out how to utilize every single element of the PC's outdated MS-DOS working framework. With my dad's assistance and an old programming book close by, I even made basic video games for my more youthful sibling to play.

My family taught me to be autonomous by giving me chances to learn by experimentation. Consider another scene, where my guardians purchased another microwave when I was only 8 years of age. As they unloaded the microwave, I asked to see the manual. After inspecting the content front-to-back, I realized one imperative thing: how to utilize a component called "tyke lock," or as I saw it, "parent lock." By squeezing a unique arrangement of catches on the microwave, I crippled it, in this manner shielding my parents from the perils of utilizing the machine without my supervision. Until this day, the first thing I do in the wake of purchasing another contraption is to peruse the whole manual, looking for clever elements.

I would like to keep applying my interest in the workings of specific devices to all parts of my life, investigating the world through wondering eyes. By declining to acknowledge the conspicuous clarification, declining to settle for a shallow comprehension, and declining to accept the norm, awesome American trailblazers like -- my good example Benjamin Franklin -- made new information, new advancements, and new developments. I endeavor to do likewise. It's a piece of who I am, and what makes me more cheerful when presented with every new technology I encounter.

# Nerve Anonymous

## Stanford students possess an intellectual vitality. Reflect on an idea or experience that has been important to your intellectual development. (250 word limit.)

I clutched my binder and walked to the front of the room. This defense would be tough. A bill legalizing same‐sex marriage had never been passed at conference. With a nod, the chair silently granted me permission to speak. My lips parted, the words to my opening argument on the tip of my tongue.

My stomach was in knots as I paced the hallway, panic setting in. Breathe, I reminded myself, exhaling sharply. As homeroom was dismissed, students streamed into the hallway. Including him. I forced my legs to move; I was ready to utter only a single line: “Will you go to prom with me?”

I pried opened the tenth case to find a violin, strings missing, bow soiled. This one would take a week to rehabilitate. Sighing, I remembered my music teacher’s words. Kids were in exodus from the music classes without decent instruments, but this project could change everything. I surveyed the damage, hesitant to commit to the seemingly impossible.

I earned my Gold Award for creating an instrument library at my school, saw my bill become law, and survived my first rejection. What I’ve learned from these instances, put together, is that risks are worth taking. It’s important to have enough passion to rise above failure. So while I may feel reluctant, I continue to move away from my comfort zone. Pushing through these moments of uncertainty is when I’ve experienced real growth, and made breakthroughs--each one different, each one a lesson.

# Guilty By Assumption Emma Lavetter-Keidan

## Stanford students are known to possess a sense of intellectual vitality. Tell us about an idea or experience that you found intellectually engaging.

The smell of clear hair gel, shoe polish, and satisfaction trails down the hall quickly on the heels of the prosecutor as he exits the room. He is followed a moment later by the scent of off-brand detergent, weak coffee, and defeat shuffling alongside the defense attorney. Over his shoulder hangs a worn leather satchel holding countless papers about his client, who has just been found guilty of all charges.

For the rest of the day, I can’t get out of my head how slanted everything seems towards the prosecutor. All the meetings I saw that day even made me think that there might be a minimum height requirement for the job. Maybe the government believes that prosecutors need to make 25% more than public defenders in order to cover the tailoring costs of having their pants lengthened. Somehow, I doubt that this is the reason for the widening difference in salaries. Does our society really assume innocent until proven guilty if we are giving significantly more resources to prosecutors than to public defenders? It seems that our government has adopted the Hobbesian philosophy that people are born evil, which helps explain why there are so many people incarcerated within the United States. My recent experience shadowing a Federal Judge and other various participants in the court system, including prosecutors, defense attorneys, and probation officers, has led me to consider the underlying philosophy behind this issue. While there has been a lot of push to change legislation on incarceration, it seems that the problem is twofold: the laws on incarceration are too harsh, and as a society we assume the worst about human nature.

# Finding Purpose Emma Lavetter-Keidan

## If you had a day to spend as you wish, how would you use your time?

Brrring! In a flash my hand grabs the phone from its receiver: “Assemblyman Ortiz’s office, how can I help you?” I say, clasping the phone against my shoulder, so both hands can aid me as I struggle to open a drawer that has now become an adamant opponent in my search for a pen. Out of the corner of my eye I see Fran thunk down a stack of manilla envelopes, each full to the point of bursting, just as the person on the phone begins dictating his number. “Take to the mailroom,” Fran mouths. I press the phone into my ear in order to hear what is being said over the clamor of the office door swinging open. Three men appear, carrying in with them an animated argument about the New York City minimum wage. Content, I lean back in my chair.

This is how I want to spend my days: working alongside people who want solve the same problems I do. Looking down at my notes for a press release I’ve researched and the mailing information for a new piece of legislation, I feel useful. I thrive here, immersed in the constant high energy environment, the endless stream of tasks, and the feeling that with each article I file I might be making a difference. “Working for the government is a thankless job. No one is going to be there to pat you on the back when you’ve done something right,” a teacher once told me. I used to be worried that, faced with a mountain of tasks and no direct validation, I would lose my purpose. Now, I know that the fact that I am working towards making a difference is enough to keep me going.

# Redefining My Purpose Through Slam Poetry Anonymous

## Describe the world you come from; for example, your family, clubs, school, community, city, or town. How has that world shaped your dreams and aspirations?

The stage lights burst open, blinding and white. I trembled. I was at the citywide poetry slam, Verselandia, about to perform in front of hundreds.

Earlier in the month, I had qualified through my high school’s contest, which I had signed up for because, “Hey, there might be free cookies!” (There were not.) At the time, I didn’t know much about spoken word artistry except from street performers (this was downtown Portland, after all). But I practiced in front of my mirror, my friends, and my faithful stuffed animals. Ultimately, I placed first at school.

At Verselandia, I watched others deliver lyrics about abuse, racism, and feminism. A few talked about their LGBTQ+ identities; one addressed bisexual erasure, which I could personally relate to. Slowly, I realized that writing didn’t serve just as a cathartic outlet; it could startle others into empathy and create awareness. When my turn came, I delivered lines like “Your heritage is more than an exotic enigma.” Afterwards, several of my Chinese-American classmates told me they could relate. I realized that my writing had the power to give these experiences visibility, which in turn might help erase damaging yet common preconceptions about my ethnicity.

As a Portland Youth Poet Ambassador, I have opportunities to not only promote creative writing, but also advocate for social equality. This is the narrative I live. Through poetry, I want to depict not only a narrative from a person of color, but also a narrative of a queer person of color--a perspective too often neglected the media, but too important for me ever to remain silent.

**What I Learned from Synchronized Swimming 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.**

When I was ten months old, I grabbed onto the coffee table and hauled myself up, arms shaking, fists clenched, knees wobbling; ten minutes later, much to my parents’ dismay, I was sprinting around the house, choppy bangs flapping in the wind like sails. When I was 17 months old, my grandmother wondered how such a short and round child could invariably evade her grasp. And when I was three years old, I decided that my toddler brother would become my (somewhat limp) wrestling partner. It then dawned on my parents that I had both too much energy and a predisposition to trip over nothing, a dangerous combination under any circumstances. Apparently, I needed some way to expel my extra vigor while also not becoming a safety liability. And so, at the age of six, I joined my local synchronized swimming team.

The first few years in the sport were uncomfortable, as I seemed to have no rhythm or natural understanding of how to contort my body into any graceful positions. Were it not for my logic-defying natural buoyancy, I would have been even more of a safety hazard. I was shy and awkward, and I couldn’t seem to understand what I needed to convey to the judges. My lack of emotional connectivity was so rigid that my teammates had to resort to screaming the word “underwear” at me in an attempt to get me to smile. For years, my struggles against any show of vulnerability persisted both in and out of the pool, with teachers and coaches alike commenting “good work, but would love to see more engagement.”

In synchronized swimming, engagement with the audience is the heart of the sport. It represents the pursuit towards finally convincing others that no, my lungs are not on fire, no, I can’t feel the sixty-seven bobby pins stuck straight into my scalp, and yes, I’m perfectly fine, thank you very much. It is the art of displaying all the complexities of movement of any gymnast or dancer while also actively trying not to drown. Bit by bit, the intricacies of the sport started to break down this emotional wall I had built up. The sensation of music flowing around me, the feeling of cool water against my skin, the sight of my teammates’ faces, all helped me realize the full extent of my perseverance and emotion. Looking back on my years of training, I realize that the important things about synchronized swimming for me were not just the sport itself. It became the lens through which I now see the world, and the basis for my continued maturation.

Growing up with the sport as such an intrinsic part of my development, I learned to apply the lessons from each practice to my life outside the pool. My permanent bruises from getting kicked in the shins by my teammates cultivated my ability to work with others. Pushing myself to kick a little harder and reach a little farther on every lap taught me about the importance of determination. My desire to help others developed through mentoring the younger girls on the team, and later presented itself in my volunteering and community service work. Placing 11th at a competition that selected the top 10 girls for the U.S. National Team taught me how to handle failure, and how to turn a devastating situation into a poignant and educational one. The next year, hearing the lushness of the national anthem as we won gold for the U.S., I realized that my earlier heartbreak had actually motivated me to work harder towards my dreams. For me, synchronized swimming isn’t about the glittery swimsuits and dramatic makeup. It’s about the lifelong friendships formed, the resolution and drive that are enriched from each practice, and, when the going gets tough, the ability to grit your teeth and smile in the face of everything else.

# Epigenetics: How It Affects Our Future Anonymous

## Describe the scientific concept (e.g. plate tectonics, quantum mechanics) most important to your world view and explain why it is so critical to your outlook.

For decades, the classic dispute of “nature vs. nurture” in regards to our maturation has dominated the debate about how children develop. Does a specific gene passed on from your parents predispose you to a life of crime? Are children more likely to develop high blood pressure because of their genetic composition, or from their exposure to an unhealthy diet? The world is fascinated with finding the answers to these questions, as they have dramatic implications as to how much free will each of us can hope to maintain. Like many people, I thought that the issue of development boiled down to these two competing forces: the unchangeable traits bestowed upon you by your parents, and the effect of your environment on the person you would become. So for me, the concept of a possible third option, known as epigenetics, was both confusing and strangely exciting.

Epigenetics refers to the modification of an organism’s genetic expression; in other words, it embodies the control over which genes in the genome are actually expressed. Studies performed with older identical twins have shown that even when two people share the exact same genetic sequence, their epigenetic markers, when built up over time, can lead to drastic differences in their predispositions to certain diseases. What is significant, though, is that these markers are only temporary and can be changed due to certain environmental factors. Most importantly, it means that the effects of the genome on the person’s traits are no longer set in stone, and that something we once thought was rigid and fixed may be more within our control than we thought.

The concept of epigenetics did more than revolutionize the way we think about genetics and its role in development; it raised new questions as to how accountable we must be for our actions. Epigenetic studies have shown that the choices we make can not only affect our lives, but also affect our children’s lives as well. What if the fact that I didn’t exercise enough predisposed my child towards contracting a certain disease? What if the fact that I didn’t eat healthily enough meant that my child wouldn’t be able to handle stress? Now, it seems that my actions won’t just affect me anymore, and as such, this mentality dictates much of my life.

The implications of epigenetics encompass the way we think about the future and our sense of familial responsibility. Personally, I feel inspired to live a more complete, healthy, and balanced life, not just for my personal fulfillment, but as a sort of stepping stone for the health of my children. As such, I have an increased appreciation for my own actions and choices, and it is the concept of epigenetics that guides the way I think about the future.

# Why Politics? Anonymous

## Describe the world you come from - for example, your family, community or school - and tell us how your world has shaped your dreams and aspirations."

I want to change the cynical, bitter stigma attached to politics. Many only see corruption and greedy lobbying, but politics is my outlet to solve the growing problems of our modern world. Nothing else has the potential to affect the lives of every single human being.

Walking into Senator Bob Wieckowski’s district office on my first day, I had read California Legislature Vol. 4 cover to cover and researched every nuance of the senator’s political agenda. My greatest fear was boring intern work. Thankfully, from the moment I was given my own office and government profile, I knew I wouldn’t be delivering decafs.

I was tasked with resolving voters’ personal concerns while leading a team to organize community events. I will never forget my phone call with Mrs. Torres. She could no longer afford the rent after her husband passed away. Her sobbing turned to joy as I explained Wieckowski’s Senate Bill 501, which lowered wage garnishment for low income workers. I sent my notes of our conversation to the senator, who used them in committee to show the bill’s potential impact. Mrs. Torres retained her home after the bill passed.

Having direct, meaningful impact on people in my community was truly a dream come true. A small taste of real responsibility was all it took to light a fire within me. I began pursuing more influential tasks, such as writing drafts for the Senator’s speeches and representing him at ceremonial events. However, I learned the most when I watched him in action.

“Get the bill through committee today, or you’re dead to me!” he screamed.

Senator Wieckowski’s voice boomed through the halls and filled my ears with delight. It was the sound of progress. He put his whole heart behind each of his bills, even crossing partisan lines to get them passed. Senator Wieckowski embodies what many elected officials have forgotten: politics is the governing of PEOPLE. He isn’t just the type of politician I hope to become, but rather the type of person I strive to be.

I stared at my boss from the Senate Chamber balcony. I couldn’t help but imagine myself in his seat. As the committee meeting began, Senator Wieckowski turned toward me.

“I’d like to acknowledge my summer intern, Preston Liu, for his service to District 10…,” he announced.

As he explained my service, I rose over the smiles and applause of every California Senator. I knew I belonged in that room.

# Me vs. Peanut Butter Anonymous

## Describe the most significant challenge you have faced and the steps you have taken to overcome this challenge. How has this challenge affected your academic achievement?

As my tongue swelled, I realized — hold on, this might be a peanut butter cookie. Immediately, I began to panic — “I’m too young to die! I haven’t even gone to college yet!” Then I reminded myself. “Stay calm. Getting worried won’t help.” Instead, I methodically responded: keep yourself together, take medication, alert others, stay cautious until the danger has passed.

My preparation had paid off. Ever since I was born, I’ve been allergic to peanuts. When I was younger, accidentally eating them was a sure way to end up in the emergency room. Even now, I occasionally slip up, ingest something that I didn’t expect to have peanuts, and get to feel the painful sensations of an allergic reaction. However, while these reactions are still threatening, I’ve taken steps to subdue them. Educating myself about my allergy, I became aware that epinephrine is needed in a severe reaction to prevent anaphylactic shock, but antihistamines are sufficient for mild cases; in the name of preparedness, I began to carry both an EpiPen and Benadryl, to deal with either reaction. Meanwhile, practice remaining calm has made me better at staying level headed under stress. This is essential for thinking clearly and determining how serious a reaction is. This assessment then lets me act appropriately.

Yet, while these skills are essential when dealing with literal peanuts, they’ve also helped me handle metaphorical, less life-threatening peanuts. Just as I know what foods can cause trouble and what medications can help, I know what actions can create interpersonal conflict, and what actions foster harmony. Just as I keep my composure when I’ve eaten a peanut, I don’t lose it when I’ve got a major test or essay coming up. And just as I plan how to alleviate a reaction before responding, when faced with a sudden challenge, I plan my solution before executing it. So while peanuts may have been my greatest challenge, working to overcome them has helped me in all areas of life. It’s given me a paradigm for responding to any difficulties, making all problems easier to solve. After all, they’re “just” peanuts.

# Two Halves Make A... Michelle Anna Brier

## Stanford students possess an intellectual vitality. Reflect on an idea or experience that has been important to your intellectual development.

In the first grade, I told my classmates that one of my favorite foods was rice. One of my friends asked me why, and I responded, “Why not? Doesn’t everyone eat rice daily?”

It took me a while to realize that not everyone has Vietnamese cuisine for dinner regularly. I began to notice the cultural divides all around me, including the ones within my own family. I noticed how my father’s Caucasian family and my mother’s Vietnamese family never truly intermingled with one another. For example, I had two Christmases every year, one with my dad’s side of the family and one with my mother’s side. One in which I spoke English, the other in Vietnamese. I found myself suspended between two worlds.

However, as the years passed, I came to embrace the mixed heritage that set me apart and opened my eyes to all of our differences amongst our similarities. Intrigued by the diversity of the world, I seek to understand others and the worlds they come from. I enjoy learning about other cultures and traditions, and my life in the diverse Bay Area has only fueled this interest. In school, I found myself fascinated in French class, going home every day and struggling to read French news sites as my comprehension and understanding of the culture slowly improved. Ultimately, I realized that my ethnic background has been monumental in shaping my worldview. . . and in carving my desire to delve into the unknown.

# Common App Anonymous

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

As I sat there, a wave of apprehension rolled over me. I don't have to do this. Nobody is forcing me to. In fact, there would be a score of people happy to see me give up. I drew a heavy sigh as I crumpled the paper in front of me and tossed it, letting it join the host of incomplete thoughts in the waste bin. A glance at the calendar told me I had three days until the band passes judgment on my ability to serve as the next drum major. Spurred by the approaching deadline, I retrieved the paper from the bin and headed to the mirror to rehearse my speech. Standing tall, I pretended to gaze around my audience.

"Hello, I'm trying out..." my voice faltered as I caught sight of my reflection. I paused, taking a moment to reassess myself. I am a freshman, yet the girl in the mirror looked older. If I was indeed older, perhaps I would've been met with less opposition from the senior class. To try out for drum major as a freshman was taboo, and many doubted that I could succeed due to my "lack of experience" in the marching band. Rather than being discouraged, their opposition propelled me to dedicate hours into preparing for the audition. In the days leading up to the audition, I convinced myself that if I studied the music score hard enough, if I practiced conducting enough, I could change the opinion of the band. It was due to this work ethic that I was able to win the majority of the band's vote. Little did I know that I had also received the highest rating for conducting as well as approval from the staff panel. The call that I received Monday morning changed my life, as I took on the position of drum major.

As I attended leadership camps, I realized that being drum major required more than just a loud command voice and the ability to conduct (or as I like to call it, interpretive hand dancing). Being the drum major required that I set good examples, assist others with technique, mediate conflicts between section leaders, and simply support the band. Attending camp broadened my knowledge about the technicalities of leadership, yet conversing with the other drum majors led me to realize that leadership cannot be taught, but must be developed through experience. The term "drum major" became redefined as I learned that I must be prepared to serve others, putting their needs before my own. As a naive freshman, I pictured the prestige and glory associated with the position. After three years of drum majoring, I now understand that drum major is not a title, but a role, akin to how leadership is not a position, but an action. As my disposition towards leadership improved, I began to apply myself to school, wanting to become more involved as I had with the band. No longer afraid of failure, I ran for club positions, shared my thoughts in class, and entered science fairs. While I ran the risk of embarrassment or espousing a failed hypothesis, I learned the value of failure. Even in failure, there is experience that will lend itself to future endeavors.

While I occasionally joke to my friends about losing my band childhood, I do not regret auditioning for drum major. The process itself taught me the value of perseverance and discipline. By transferring criticism into motivation for self-improvement, I have been able to succeed. In the past, the girl in the mirror may have looked unsure of her place, uncertain in the face of opposition. If she were to step in front of the mirror today, she would see a confident drum major, a leader unlimited by the bounds of society.

# The Third Shot Steven Michael Wang

## 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.

On any given dusky afternoon, I find myself asking the pressing question: Will I make it a third time in a row? I raise my arms, examine a dulled orange orb clinging to my aching, sweaty palms, and squint at the near-invisible net. Far from aspiring to become an NBA player, I use my recreational basketball skills as a daily relaxing ritual. I fall into a rhythm, a fluctuating combination of layups, free throws, and outbursts: "3...2...1!" I imagine shooting the game-winning basket in the last seconds of my coliseum game. But, no matter how tired I am, my workouts always end the same: three baskets in a row. Of course nobody is there to enforce this law, but it feels wrong to leave without accomplishing this arguably foolish task.

My tendency to set arbitrary goals serves as a sort of closure for me. Seeing the third basketball swish through the net evokes such a euphoric feeling; it represents a consistent end. I admit it - I need closure. I enjoy stories with a beginning and ending; I furiously research movies that end with cliffhangers after watching them; I demand answers to unsolved problems: Is there a universal cure for cancer? How can we stop aging? Where do we come from? It thrills and perplexes me that explanations currently unperceivable to the human mind will someday answer such questions. Therefore, I approach each pursuit as a basketball challenge I have to complete: knowing I will miss many shots along the way, I will persist until I make my magical three and reach a conclusion that satisfies.

While the third swish of the net is always an enjoyable sound, my true satisfaction from this self-imposed three-shot test stems from the journey the basketball takes: the perfect backspin, the initial angling of the shot, and the beautiful arc of the ball's trajectory. Likewise, the most meaningful aspect of my search for closure lies not in the actual discovery of the truth, but in the arduous journey of reaching such a conclusion. It's within these journeys that I expand my perspectives and understand new viewpoints through interactions with other individuals. In my search for technological ways to alleviate human suffering, for example, I've started to question the meaning of "impossible" after interacting with Mick Ebeling, an inventor who 3D prints prosthetic limbs. Like every three-shot challenge, no pursuit I undertake is ever the same. I have the opportunity to stretch my perspectives to great lengths in any direction I choose, to learn from the untapped memories and experiences of unique individuals. It all exists within the journey.

So will I make three-in-a-row tonight? I raise the basketball up in the air and fling it with calculated force. As I watch the illuminating orange sphere twirl in the air, I remember that my need for closure transcends the final conclusions I reach. Each question I seek to answer holds a journey, an arduous mid-region to traverse, that will inevitably expand my viewpoints, values, and beliefs. The ball swivels on the rim before finally dropping into the white mesh. A day's journey has ended; a new one has just begun.

# The Pursuit for Debate Steven Michael Wang

## Stanford students possess an intellectual vitality. Reflect on an idea or experience that has been important to your intellectual development.

It was the start of something new. There I was, a freshman bouncing on the beanbags in the debate room, ready to embark on a new journey called Extemporaneous Speaking. I decided to try this event defined by its rapid-fire intensity to prepare and memorize a seven-minute speech in thirty minutes.

Yet, this optimism crumbled as I opened the school's evidence Dropbox at my first tournament. Harker Extemp: 3.2 MB, 10 files. With this minute evidence pool, I walked into the speaking room and attempted to emulate a professional politician, haphazardly piecing together strings of random phrases. Unsurprisingly, I finished my almost comedic performance embarrassed and flustered. But I saw a vision of what I could become. With encyclopedic knowledge, I would analyze the geopolitical relationships between Japan, Afghanistan, and Malaysia or predict the direction of Bulgaria's economy. I would leave the audience perplexed, enlightened, and in awe of the workings of the world, even for seven minutes.

It's that surging desire to conquer knowledge that drove me to unravel the complexity of the world on a deeper level. My journey swept me across Paul Krugman's economic theories to present-day adaptations of revolutionist political ideologies. I immersed myself in research analyses by political think tanks and magazines like The Economist. Most importantly, I embraced this depth of understanding that simply made life more interesting.

With this intellectual backbone guiding my educational pursuits, I sit on the same beanbags three years later and smile. Harker Extemp: 5.49 GB, 7921 files.

# Making Space for My Muse Anonymous

## Please write a letter to your roommate.

Dear roommate,

Don’t be afraid if you hear noises at night. It’s probably just my muse going out for a walk. I know, she’s really loud. But she never listens to me when I tell her to keep it down.

And she’ll be back in the morning, so please make room for her. She’s greedy and takes up a lot of space. She’s really annoying and she’s also a lot like a rabbit. If you don’t pet her and give her enough attention, she’ll die. Maybe it’s for the best.

Why do I put up with her? She’s my muse. Without her….I don’t know how I’d live. My writing would be absolutely crap, and..I don’t know how I’d live.

What’s I’m trying to say is that right now she has gone to the fridge to get us snacks and that’s why I’m so incoherent in explaining what I mean. Oh good, she’s back. With guac.

My muse is like a lovable golden retriever. Long golden locks. Big brown eyes. A smile as bright as the stars. A smile that can light up all of Palo Alto and cure cancer and -

Sorry. She took over the keyboard for a few seconds, while I was distracted by my guac. Do you see what I have to put up with?

I’m just kidding. She’s the inspiration for my stories and she is the reason I create and she’s amazing. Can’t cure cancer, but amazing nevertheless.

I apologize in advance

# How a Gay Mormon Fell in Love with the Middle East 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 am the complete contradiction of what I was expected to be, and I couldn’t be more proud. As a gay ex-Mormon who left home at sixteen, moved across the world, and began learning Arabic, I’m may well be the most unconventional person from Rigby, Idaho. These eccentricities stem from my life’s greatest conundrum: I’m inconveniently homosexual, and my family has rooted itself fully in Mormon Church doctrine. To anyone unsure of the Church’s stance on homosexuality, I’ll admit that coming out to my family has been virtually impossible for me.

For my entire childhood, my parents avidly expressed their discontent towards “the damn gays”. They painted the queer community as a small, homogenous group of militant social rebels living in San Francisco, or “Hell on Earth”. My parents adamantly believe that sexuality is a choice, and throughout my childhood, I was told I’d be kicked out if I ever decide to “become” gay. I feared for my own safety: if my parents found out, they would’ve cut me off completely. My situation motivated me to become extremely critical of my family’s radical homophobia, which ultimately led me to question everything my family expected me to believe.

Several years ago, I accompanied my dad on a particularly impactful Wal-Mart errand. Behind us in the check-out line, a veiled woman was speaking Arabic on a phone call. Completely unprovoked, my dad began loudly making racial slurs, and stormed out of the store. Never before had I encountered someone who shared in my identity struggle, and instantly, I empathized with her. The emotion I felt caused an intangible attraction within me towards her culture. I became obsessed with Middle Eastern society, as this women symbolized my life’s dilemma. I soon began taking secretive trips to our public library to research the Middle East. Hidden under my mattress at home, library books like “The First Muslim” and “Reading Lolita in Tehran” became the foundation of my knowledge of the region.

Although reading about the Middle East had stimulated my curiosity exceedingly, I felt disengaged from the real Arab world. I strongly desired a perspective which extends beyond rural Idaho. While connecting with random exchange students on Facebook, I learned about the perfect opportunity: Atlantic College. AC is an international residential school in the United Kingdom: the first United World College, and the only one which offers Arabic as a second language IB course. Soon, I realized that the only way I could afford attending Atlantic College was through participating in the extremely competitive American UWC National Committee selection process. Those who are admitted are awarded full-tuition scholarships, and although the AC scholarship’s acceptance rate was around 0.4% the year before I applied, I decided to put in an application, against all odds. For six intense months, I participated in an extremely intense selection process which even led me to New Mexico for in-person group evaluations. On April 14th at 2:53pm, I received an email stating that I’d been offered the AC Davis Scholarship. Immediately, I started working every odd job available to save for a one-way ticket to London, and that August, I moved to the United Kingdom.

Regardless of my long-term aspirations, I have discovered the one overarching goal I hold: when I decide to come out, I don’t want to be defined by my sexuality. I want my parents to pat me on the back with looks of approval in their eyes, and not be ashamed in my identity, even if it contradicts their own ideologies. Ultimately, I want my contribution to society to counteract even the strongest prejudices, so I’m not referred to as “Nate, my gay son”, but rather, “Nate, my son, who makes me proud."

# The (Real) Book of Mormon Nathan Gordon

## Please describe an idea or experience which has been important in the development of your intellectual vitality.

When I was eight, I read the 531-page Book of Mormon cover-to-cover. The vocabulary and concepts which comprised the set of doctrine was unbelievably complex, so it usually took an entire hour to get through three of its short pages. To do this, I excitedly flipped through footnote references in the Bible Dictionary, Topical Guide, and other scriptural verses to understand what the verses discussed. The approach I took to analyzing the Book of Mormon changed the way I read, and I applied that analytical approach to anything from my daily newspaper scour to the literature I study for IB English.

The Book of Mormon was also the key to understanding my culture: any question I had or problem I faced, I could always apply scriptures towards my situation. Ultimately, the Book of Mormon made me excited about answering my own questions, and it taught me how to connect with my family and community through thoughtful, doctrinebased conversations about life.

Although I’ve disengaged from the spiritual aspect of the Church, I’m still fascinated by the Book of Mormon and its teachings. Even after moving to Wales, I’ve continued attending Mormon services each Sunday to further understand my religion. To some, it may seem absurd, yet it’s one of my life’s greatest passions. Despite Mormonism’s rigid incompatibility with my sexual identity, The Book of Mormon represents the way my mind works. I don’t want to let it go.

# Fake It 'Till You Make It Anonymous

## Stanford students possess an intellectual vitality. Reflect on an idea or experience that has been important to your intellectual development. (100 to 250 words)

“All-analysis-is-contrary-to-its-own-intent-and-the-affirmative’s-presentation-of-the-1ac-has-made-their-advocacy-even-less-convincing.-Every-additional-thousand-page-paper-scientists-publish-to-convince-us-that-climate-change-is-real-is-just-indicative-of-their-own-insecurities,-and-thus-becoming-even-less-persuasive.”

This is a real-time transcription of one of my most recent debate speeches—a passionate spew at 350 words-per-minute on a post-modern philosopher. Discussing Jean Baudrillard’s critiques of information sharing is not really what one expects from “policy” debate, but the range of argumentative styles in debate is astonishing.

From straightforward discussions of the spending deficit and zero-sum international alliances, to critical race theory and post-modernist critiques of a policy’s representations, debate has pushed me into the rabbit hole of cost-benefit analysis. Do I determine the value of a policy by the economic growth it triggers or by its ethical implications?

If anything, the different outcomes of two debates having the exact same discussion have only confirmed that no real-world decision has just one right answer. Not only has extensive research educated me in various perspectives, it’s also compelled me to reconcile ideological differences and integrate ideas together. Part of my desire for pragmatism is considering the usefulness of knowledge. Even if Baudrillard is correct in his criticisms of information overload, does he present a solution? But above all, the most important aspect of my intellectual growth has been developing the mental resiliency demanded from such a high-risk, high-reward activity.

They say to “fake it ‘till you make it,” but my personal motto is to “be confident, but humble.” It’s a delicate balance—cockiness can destroy you in an activity based on perception, but if you lose the game in your head, it’s over before the debate has even begun.

# Good Things Come In Three Anonymous

## What matters to you, and why? (100 to 250 words)

“Good things come in threes.”

I walked into my first job thinking I was overqualified; most of my coworkers were Chinese immigrants attending the local community college. But time slowly brought a new lens of admiration into my perspective. They left behind all familiarity to live in a country where they're too busy taking care of needs to even think about wants. And still, they believe in the “American Dream™.”

We’re so fixated on being closer to the finish line that oftentimes, we forget we were three steps ahead to begin with. They taught me to **judge success by what was sacrificed**.

~

I froze, lifting the covers to find my father’s hidden gun. It confirmed the fear I felt every time my father came home from a night of gambling.

Emotionally ‘filled” with a five-hundred-dollar gift card on Christmas Day, I understood in that moment that **money couldn’t buy happiness**.

~

I had four Advils instead of breakfast on the first day of AP/IB testing. With a long day ahead of me, my struggle with fibromyalgia deemed it a necessary choice.

That spring, all I could feel or think about was pain. It wasn’t that I didn’t care about anything else but rather, I couldn’t—**you can’t take good health for granted.**

~

Good things come in three—sometimes, not-so-good things too.

But that’s okay—every story has an ending we can learn from.

# When problems arise, I solve them using copper fittings Pat cummins

## 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 first discovered this versatile building material as a seven-year-old visiting my father's HVAC shop. While waiting for him to finish working one night, I wandered from the modestly finished space at the front of the building to the shop in back, which featured high ceilings and imposing stacks of shelves. I was fascinated by the dusty machines with tubes, knobs, and old cracked nozzles. When Dad found me shoulder-deep in the scrap copper bin--which I later referred to as "the world's coolest trash can"--he determined that it was time to teach me to solder. Thirty minutes later, armed with a bowl haircut, a pair of safety glasses, and a healthy dose of self-confidence, I was ready to take on the world.

From then on, my childhood was a patchwork of failures. I fell into a constant cycle of thinking, designing, building, and rethinking. Common Christmas wish list items included drafting supplies and architectural stencils. Each childhood interest led me back to the shop, where I figured out a way to build it from copper fittings. Learning to play trombone inspired me to design my own instrument. After a faulty mouthpiece and soldering mistakes ruined three prototypes, "The Plumbone," an instrument that could play three distinct notes, became my first successful creation. When a middle school acids and bases project called for building a paper maché volcano, I built a cannon instead. Though my first model failed to "erupt," my second sprayed its contents so far that it left a swath of dead grass in my lawn. While the grass grew back, I built a soapbox car entirely out of copper and steel strut channel only to find myself claiming last place in the annual "Soapbox Derby." Noting that the lightest cars accelerated quickest, I rebuilt my car, replacing steel with PVC pipe, and took second the next year. Having navigated around so many obstacles, I imagined that I could build anything so long as I had copper fittings.

As I matured, however, I began to drift away from my old standby. While attempting increasingly abstract projects, I grew frustrated by the limitations of copper fittings. It felt like the end of an era when I decided to build one last copper item, a small creature that I gifted to my dad.

Leaving the familiarity of copper behind felt like entering a new, entirely foreign world. Embracing the freedom and uncertainty of Python, I began coding my newest idea: a game called "Dive." While the concept proved exhaustingly ambitious, success seemed imminent as I stitched my project together, patch by patch. Yet when I looked through my computer one morning, I realized that "Dive" was gone, wiped inadvertently during a visit to the Apple store. I stared in disbelief at the blank computer screen, wondering if my vision was lost forever.

At this pivotal moment, I realized why copper fittings represent such an important part of my childhood. When my cannon refused to fire correctly, I learned something new about propulsion. When I soldered my instruments incorrectly, I refined my technique. Had I given up every time an idea failed, I would not have learned from my mistakes, and more importantly, I would not have found success. Even if I never solder again, the lessons I learned from copper fittings are the lessons that will guide me through life.

Losing "Dive" remains difficult to accept, yet excitement about the potential in a new game quickly overshadowed my disappointment. Years of faulty designs and unfortunate accidents have taught me to revise my methods, but not my goals, in the face of failure. With a confidence that only arises after realizing that success was just out of reach and finding the audacity to reach further, I set out to make "Dive 2.0," the best game you'll ever play.

# Orange Tea Anonymous

## Write a letter to your future roommate.

Dear roommate,

Fair warning: when you walk into our room, you’ll smell an odd, sweet tanginess. Yet, before you have the chance to investigate, I’ll be jumping off the bed and pouring you a mug of my signature orange oolong tea — the source of the mystery fragrance.

Perhaps you’ll then notice the small collection of teas and teapots or the tidy stack of old books on my nightstand. (Jane Austen is my favorite.) Or perhaps your eyes will be fixated on the large flag of a kiwi-bird shooting green lasers out of the eyes.

Wait, kiwi bird and lasers?

Before you become concerned for my sanity, I’ll explain that it was my favourite finalist contender for the updated New Zealand flag and a good conversation starter.

While we haven’t met, I promise that I’ll be your loyal partner in crime. When you’re lying in bed awake feeling homesick, I promise to give you my sacred Netflix password and binge-watch reruns of Friends with you. If you’re ever feeling nervous, I’ll sit you down and reenact dramatic pep-talks to remind you that you’ll be great.

I promise that everyday I’ll be waiting with a steaming cup of mysterious tea to hear all about your day. Whatever it is, you can always count on me, because I know I can count on you too.

# The Soundtrack of My Life Sagada Penano

## Describe a topic, idea, or concept you find so engaging that it makes you lose all track of time. Why does it captivate you? What or who do you turn to when you want to learn more?

I lean my head against the cold glass window and watch the world fly by at 70 mph, as the soothing tones of stringed instruments and a dancing guitar line melt into Emm Gryner’s voice singing "Stereochrome." I was 6 years old, riding in the backseat of my parent’s station wagon on a 4-hour road trip to our annual mountain biking destination. A few years pass and we meet 10-year-old me. I’m in my bedroom reading a “Magic Tree House” book, as my floor vibrates with a pulsating rhythm from the bass roaring downstairs. My Dad’s band is inconceivably loud. I still remember the muffled sound of a woman’s voice belting “Son of a Preacher Man.” Next thing I know, I’m an emotional 13-year-old middle schooler, sobbing into my pillow while the sound of Morrissey’s voice speaks to me through my earbuds and silences every other sound in the world. By next year I am 14, listening intently to the sound of my bassoon echoing off my living room walls, approaching my second hour of practice. Hundreds of hours of practicing later, I am 16, interacting with the sound of my bassoon as it resonates with the acoustics of the Kennedy Center, echoing across the hall and touching even the back row of the audience. Now, I am 17, standing in a tailcoat, conducting the band from the 50 yard line of a football field as I hear the roar of 200 instruments bringing life to Shostakovich.

It seems like music has always been there for me, whether I'm listening, or playing, or directing. It has become an integral part of who I am- melodies ingrained into my mind, chords and harmonies locked into memories. Music is my passion, each and every style adding to that rich and vibrant web of art. I treasure the creativity and freedom expressed in jazz, the emotions and energy poured into rock n’ roll, the rhythmic intricacies and thumping bass of funk that just makes you want to get up and dance. However, my true love will always be classical music. While most students use classical music as background ambiance for studying, or as a soundtrack to fall asleep to, dozing off is the last thing I will do when listening to classical music. The music captures me and I become completely immersed in the intertwining melodies and the ever-changing sonic pallet, giving each sound a certain color. I feel the way that various chords trigger different emotions, ranging from complete despair to intense joy, and it fascinates me and pulls me further and further into the music. Classical music can tell stories and convey emotions more powerfully than words could. Music has been a constant source of happiness in my life, acting like an anchor as people come and go like waves in the ocean. I wish that all people could experience music like I do, and that is why I started the “Save the Sounds” charity drive to provide method books and instruments to local elementary schools’ music programs that are struggling due to budget cuts.

In a perfect world, schools would never see budget cuts, but that's a problem to be solved another day. For now, I am here, conducting my 250-person band, the show coming to a close. I keep the tempo driving forward, building the excitement until finally, closing my fists, I bring the piece to an end. I throw my fists down in pride and watch the band snap their horns down in time with me. I subtly breaking attention with a smile I can’t hold back. The show has just ended, and another song has just been added to the soundtrack of my life- another song, and another memory to go with it.

# Parallel Worlds Sagada Penano

## Stanford students possess an intellectual vitality. Reflect on an idea or experience that has been important to your intellectual development. (100-250 words)

To pass the time in monotonous car rides, my dad would describe an environment from a random point of view. I would guess where he was, or what he was. We called this the Imagination Game. As I grew older, my dad began to recount scenes from all over the universe, ranging from an electron in a circuit to the pupil of someone’s eye. What fascinated me the most, however, was when he described small marbles orbiting a very large one. Not knowing whether my dad was inside of an atom, or a humongous giant looking down at the solar system, I asked him, “Are you big or small?” He replied, “Everything is big compared to one thing and small compared to another.” I rolled my eyes sarcastically. But looking back on it, I realized that he was teaching me about frames of reference and perspective.

That moment also planted the seed that would eventually blossom into my desire to understand the world, to understand the patterns of repetition from the atomic level to systems that span millions of lightyears. I want to understand why math can describe nature seemingly so perfectly, why the number of flower petals follows the fibonacci sequence, or why the path of a projectile is parabolic. Math and the physical world are so closely intertwined, and I want to figure out how the knot is tied.

# The Barriers and Bridges of Language Anonymous

## Stanford students possess an intellectual vitality. Reflect on an idea or experience that has been important to your intellectual development.

Pomelo, pamplemousse, trai buoi, grapefruit - Spanish, French, Vietnamese, and English. My ability to connect languages has enhanced my understanding of every subject I learn and has led me to cherish language as a bridge between different cultures and nations. I no longer view different languages as an unnecessary barrier to my comprehension. I am bilingual, and I have become accustomed to mentally translating information between different languages to ensure that I have grasped new concepts.

However, I grew increasingly aware of translations between languages, especially when I began to take language classes during my middle school and high school years. When I first took French, I realized that going through multiple translations helped me with comprehending a new language. I opted to convert French into Vietnamese and Vietnamese into English. When I took Spanish classes in high school, I utilized this same language conversion process. This technique assisted me with my academics, and it also helped me treasure the connection and beauty that language encompasses. However, I often need to monitor every word that I utter aloud, or I will accidentally speak in Spanish to my Vietnamese parents. Worse yet, I will talk in Vietnamese to my extremely confused English-speaking friends.

Still, this modern-day Tower of Babel is a place I don't intend to leave any time soon. After years of converting everything I learn from English into Vietnamese, I have become less conscious of when or how quickly I translate between languages. I have become more conscious, though, of the rich intellectual life that the dynamism of translation has given me.

# The incomprehensible secret embodied in the experience of feeling death without dying. Svenya Braich

## Write an Essay of Your Choice

There is an incomprehensible secret embodied in the experience of feeling death without dying. It is a secret that I now share with the city of Paris, and every word I write feels like the spilling out of a sacred vow. In the attack on the Bataclan in November 2015, I lost a friend. He lived his life as if it were a song, and with their bullets, they stole his voice. In the days that followed, nothing of him echoed in the hollows and dells of the world’s memory. He was Muslim, yet people proclaimed that Islam was to blame. I couldn’t understand what kind of life was left for me to live under such hate.

I searched all my favourite bookstores, but no library held the volumes that could explain why my friend was gone, and why people were blaming him. So I created my own rationalizations. They came in the form of Margaux and Ali, creatures of my imagination. Both lose their fathers on November 13th and are forced to deal with their grief in contrasting manners, thus unmasking the cultural prejudice after the attacks. Out of the infinite planes in the universe, their lines are drawn on the same one. Perpendicular, they have so much in common, but only intersect once before tending in their own directions towards infinity.

Bringing the two to life was difficult in a way that I hadn’t foreseen because I wasn’t writing fiction. It wasn’t fiction when I saw snipers on the roof of my school. It wasn’t fiction when the streets outside our Lycees, emptied immediately after class. It wasn’t fiction because the bad stuff never stops happening; it lives on in its own dimension, replaying itself over and over again. Louis’s death was tangible and real; with every keystroke, I was reminded of his laughter, of the gentle hum of his guitar.

I had to write. It was difficult, it was obscene, but if one doesn’t care for obscenity, one doesn’t care for the truth. Perhaps, if things had been different, I could have mourned silently, and let the waves of sorrow wash over me, but the unrelenting questions pushed me further. Every Saturday morning, my alarm rang at 8:30, and regardless of the capricious Parisian weather, I walked the seven hundred and sixty-three meters down Boulevard Haussmann, took a left by Opera Garnier and claimed my seat in the hidden back room at Le Café de la Paix.

They say: write what you know, and so I did. Moments of past experiences slowly revealed their coded meanings. As I drifted into coffee shops and out of dreams, I felt as though their spirits lived through me. Meandering past shisha shops, I was Ali; exploring cobblestone alleys on lazy Sunday afternoons, I was Margaux. This proximity to death brought a certain proximity to life. The scalding experience swept me beyond Louis’s life and into an era of living he would never know - an era of adventure and bewilderment.

Louis was my first friend when I moved to Paris, and was the only thing that made waking up in another foreign city bearable. He pushed me to pursue my passion in music, but once he left, the spark inside me tried to fade, because it is so much easier to forget. I wasn’t writing so that other people could share and validate my feeling of loss. I wrote to understand why the things happening around me constituted my new reality. I wrote for myself. The two years I have lived since then, have tapered to a palpitating point, and transformed into ink and paper. I battle with myself about the purpose of my manuscript, about whether I want to share the weight of my memory, or if my writing shall remain mine. To me, it is a beacon of hope, reminding me to never stop searching for answers.

# Memleket 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 trick to picking a perfect peach is simple: Gently squeeze the chot (stem and fruit junction); if the inside of the fruit is juicy and dark yellow, carefully roll the fruit and pull while holding the stem to avoid bruising.

After nine summers, countless days under the burning sun, and an overwhelming amount of fruit wasted, I became a connoisseur in picking the sweetest and most fragrant peaches in the village of Dipsizgol (bottomless lake), dramatically situated in northwestern Anatolia along the Sea of Marmara.

It was the memleket for the family, the homeland - the birthplace of my father and me, and home of my grandparents, my two uncles, and their wives and children, all living in a one-story house with a tiny stable and a coop in which they put two cows and half a dozen chickens. Somewhere near the house they had a small orchard with blossoming fruit trees; come early July and harvest time, they would need extra help, and we would leave behind our busy lives in suburban Istanbul and take a 4-hour ride to the memleket.

Being the naive, obnoxious kid that I was, I would complain about the place – how it always stinks and there is nothing to do. I had to wake up early to go for the morning prayer and help collect eggs. My knees hurt as I sat down on the floor to eat, clumsily trying to put the cloth on my lap. The sheets of the makeshift bed on the floor smelled like naphthalene and vintage fabric.

It was different, and I didn’t like it.

When I sniffed or curled my lip at something, my father would take me aside and tell me this was home. Slightly annoyed, I would swallow my anger and apologize, although I was never able to understand exactly why I had to get used to living in this strange, outlandish place when we already had a home.

To my further surprise, my father would become a completely different person in the memleket. He would speak the cryptic local Turkish dialect, wear rubber shoes, and drive a tractor around town. Watching him enjoying every bit of the memleket made me wonder why he had left in the first place.

After dropping out of middle school to earn money by herding sheep, he went on to high school despite my grandparents’ earnest efforts, abandoning the memleket for the first time. He never went to college, but he did build a stable career and life platform for himself - one he would never be able to achieve if he hadn’t left.Yet there he was, twenty-five years later, having the time of his life at the same place he willingly left behind.

Last summer was my last time in the memleket before leaving for the United States to turn over a new leaf in my life, just like my father did when he was sixteen. In hindsight, I don’t think I ever understood what he was trying to say until now, ten thousand miles away. I realized I have grown to long for the memleket, ​for something that is quite a ways from me - something that I felt I belong to and that belonged to me. Memleket is never only a place - it is part of one’s self-definition, embedded in human instinct. Memleket is the place that will gladly welcome us years after, where we are able to turn into the sixteen-year-old that we were before leaving. I am glad to have somewhere that I can call the memleket - wherever this path that I chose goes, I will have one foot behind in the memleket, where I will go back to be the same kid who wakes up for the morning prayer and collects eggs.

I will be the same kid picking the sweetest and most fragrant peaches in the entire memleket for the whole world to see.

# Making a Documented Difference Anonymous

## Tell us your story. What unique opportunities or challenges have you experienced throughout your high school career that have shaped who you are today? (500-700)

I winced in aversion when the document loaded. Displayed before me was a dauntingly long list of bizarre names, obscure titles, and dates hundreds of years in the past. As I scrolled through the PDF, my disorientation only grew.

Earlier that day, I had been enticed by my friend to join Quiz Bowl, a buzzer-based team competition testing a wide variety of academic subjects. Being a part of this sounded fun, so I was eager to accept his offer. However, visual art was a weak area of the current team, one I would need to study if I wanted to join. I was in ninth grade, and up to that point, my extracurricular interest had lie solely in math. I studied math in my free time, competed in math competitions, and watched math videos for fun. I knew math well and I stuck to it, seeing no reason to venture into other subjects. Yet sitting at home now, I knew I had to.

So one by one, I begrudgingly googled each art piece. I studied its details, learned about its painter, and became familiar with its historical context. Each day, I allocated some time for doing this, and slowly but steadily I made my way through the list. For the first week, studying art was a tedious chore. But as my mental art catalog grew, a passion started to develop within me. I began to appreciate the deliberate details of paintings, feel the unique styles of different artists, and develop tastes and personal favorites. I began to feel parallels to studying math—to experience the same enjoyment of exploring complexity and uncovering hidden beauty. The familiar excitement of learning a new math topic began to emerge whenever I immersed myself in the creative world of a new artist. I learned that my passion for math was not specific to math, but that it was a passion for discovery, a love for learning itself.

By the time I was in tenth grade, this eager desire for knowledge had led me to also study science, philosophy, and a few additional subjects for Quiz Bowl. As a now-established member of the team, I took part in daily lunch practices, spending time with bright friends who each harbored an inspiring intellectual vitality. Like me, they seemed to have an unceasing passion for learning; history, music, literature, geography—spirited conversation on almost any subject one could name filled that room every day.

Meanwhile, my interest in math flourished in parallel to my Quiz Bowl pursuits. I challenged myself with more difficult problems and studied increasingly advanced topics. Accompanied by enthusiastic peers, I dug deep into the perplexing elegance of fractals, the mystifying properties of imaginary numbers, and the dazzling world of infinities. Throughout my endeavors, a fact I encountered over and over was the humbling depth of math. Every ounce of understanding only opened up more questions and ideas to examine; every topic was a wondrous abyss of mysterious truth. My high school experience has been characterized by these two parallel pursuits—Quiz Bowl and math. Some weekends I would find myself engulfed in a flurry of buzzer sounds paired with the names of battles, monarchs, scientists, or composers. Other weekends I would be seated in a quiet room with a page of calculations and diagrams, completely absorbed as my mind hummed in deep thought.

Whereas one of my most cherished memories is exploring the museums and landmarks of Washington D.C. at a national Quiz Bowl tournament, another equally cherished memory is exploring the complexities and intricate workings of applying calculus to computer graphics during my summer math research. Ultimately, these experiences have fostered in me a love of learning that has emerged at the intersection of two contrasting perspectives. While Quiz Bowl has shown me the beautiful breadth of academic knowledge and inspired in me an eager desire to learn about diverse subjects, my involvement with math has taught me that each of these subjects is a bottomless ocean of exploration, an endless spring of insight which will never fail to quench curiosity. These two activities have given me a profound and deeply-ingrained appreciation for learning that will fuel my endeavors wherever I go.

# Three Squeezes Anonymous

## Some students have a background, identity, interest, or talent so meaningful they believe their application would be incomplete without it. If this sounds like you, please share your story.

Peonies, marigolds, asters, tulips. My small hands stroke delicate yellow, pink, blue, and I hold the petals up to the light of the bright window in awe. When the strong sunlight beams down, the flowers remind me of fairy wings in their transparency. Mama and I sit side by side at the table, facing the window that looks out onto the garden. We press flowers. Her large, weathered hands expertly peel the petals off the pages of the heavy dictionaries. If a flower has a brown edge, she trims it, and gingerly sticks the remainder to the inside of our scrapbook.

Mama’s forehead is wrinkled in concentration. Her black hair is clasped on the very top of her head, and she wears tortoise spectacles, the cheap ones you get at the dollar store, perched on the very tip of her nose. Sunspots have begun to form on her cheeks, and I have a strange urge to touch them. Earlier, we wandered hand in hand around the garden, choosing flowers to press. I point at the Daffodil. “My favorite,” I say. “I know,” she winks, and pulls it from the earth. Her favorite is the camellia.

These days, the dusk air is warm, but there’s a hint of winter. The sunsets are breathtaking, strokes of yellow and pink as if someone painted them. They are pastel colors that I later try to replicate for Mama. Mama is an artist. She shows me how to hold a brush, unlike a pencil, and I later present her my watercolors, of the forest behind our house, a city skyline. I dedicate each and every one to her with a thick sharpie. She shows me which flowers to pick, the correct way to press them, how to snip away the weeds from interfering with the stems, to water the garden every few days. “Our garden,” I say to Mama. Mama squeezes my hand three times. I-love-you.

# Poetry Anonymous

## Reflect on an experience or an idea that makes you genuinely excited about learning. (250 words)

I approach Wallace Stevens’ poetry with frightful bewilderment, occasional terror, and a sense of ambitious delight—much like how the Macbeths approached the murder of King Duncan.

Stevens was my first “difficult” poet. For fourteen years, I’d thought I “got” poetry. Occasionally, I was tripped up by a sonnet or a tricky Keatsian ode; but I thought of poetry as fundamentally within my grasp, lucid if not always easy.

Stevens, by contrast, was so baffling that I wrote off “Sunday Morning” as arrant rubbish—lovely-sounding rubbish, but rubbish nonetheless. What did any of it mean? I asked, as I turned to the available scholarship—Helen Vendler’s On Extended Wings—only to find it as dense and forbidding as the poem itself. And so it goes. . . .

“Sunday Morning” was the first poem where I had to work at it to enjoy it. Stevens required complete concentration—and most importantly, a willingness to be comfortable with only partial understanding. Questions linger even after the sixth close reading. (What is the “firecat” in “Earthy Anecdote”?) But it was the difficulty that made him so exciting a poet; the heady feeling of losing your bearings amidst undecipherable metaphors and kooky subject-matter. You had to let the words wash over you like music, and allow meaning to emerge later—or not at all.

Ever since, I’ve grown fond of “difficult,” allusive, bloody-mindedly abstruse poetry.

Stevens taught me that the purpose of poetry was to “share the confusions of intelligence.” Really—who knew that partial puzzlement could be so exciting?

# A Journey of Two Worlds Anonymous

## Tell a story from your life, describing an experience that either demonstrates your character or helped to shape it.

I showed up to school in thongs today... no not that type of thong. Indeed, Australians call flip flops, thongs. As my physcis teacher told me he 'reckons' I should take off my thongs and put on 'runners' (i.e. sneakers) to avoid labratory hazards, I couldn't help but reflect on how crazy my experience with moving really was.

Portland, OR

Kennewick, WA

Bunbury, WA

Perth, WA

Darwin, NT

5 unique cities equals 5 whole new worlds to explore.

I began life in the Pacific North West, and ended up in outback Australia.

After my 7th birthday, home would no longer be Washington. In a few days I was about to venture across the globe to a foreign place called Australia.

Which is home you ask? Arrival or Departure? Home for me means many things. The world I come from is not associated with a worn out welcome mat and friends who learned to walk together. But I love that it is inherently complex. America holds my childhood filled with pine cones, blockbuster movies and Mt. Hood snow trips; Australia owns my adolescence abundant in fast paced social scenes and the place where I grew into the person I am to this day.

Throughout my time of living through endless summers and having a regular routine of going to the beach with friends, I realized (or 'realised' as I should say thanks to my English teacher's constant reminding) that I am beyond lucky. Having the opportunity to live in these crazy and exotic places ultimately resulted in my character becoming adaptable and versatile to my surroundings, and staying still while the world around me moved.

I loved each place I lived in for different reasons. I've made unforgettable relationships with people and each place has helped shape who I am. I immediately developed an enthusiasm for swimming and surfing, and my love for these grew exponentially. Being a competitive swimmer for the past decade and taking up a job as a lifeguard for the past year has reminded me that there is something about the warmth of the salty ocean and early morning swim training that evokes a feeling of utter relaxation. Catching my first wave in Bunbury at age 8, resembled snowboarding down the golf course in Kennewick during those cherished white Christmases. This only further instilled the virtue that moving has granted me the opportunity to absorb the best of both worlds.

As I sit here writing this essay, I take a tentative look around my room filled with moving boxes as we prepare to go back to old town Portland after my high school graduation, and remind myself of the adventurous and unconventional life I've had thus far, excited for what the future holds. I think of my journey best expressed through the quote: “Where am I moving you ask? Onto better things.”

# Final Stanford Apps Anonymous

## The Stanford community is deeply curious and driven to learn in and out of the classroom. Reflect on an idea or experience that makes you genuinely excited about learning.

The smallest things in life often carry the most meaning.

I realized this when I found myself as the only teen among a group of teachers for a USACF meeting in Brooklyn. As I sat there nervously, clenching onto my shirtsleeves, I came face to face with the Bridge Pi—a small, hotspot-like device created from a series of mini-computers known as a Raspberry Pi. In it holds hundreds of gigabytes of educational resources, like textbooks and encyclopedias, to improve schooling in Africa. Despite its mere dimensions—roughly the size of my palm—this device enabled me to recognize the magnitude at which technology can transform education.

Beyond showing me the value of innovation, I’ve taken a deeper appreciation for the Pi, recognizing it as a hallmark of human curiosity. The device can be assembled in just 30 minutes, but it took nearly a year’s worth of deliberation to create. Its existence alone demonstrates the power of knowledge—how we can use what we know and what we desire to know to create new outlets for endless possibilities.