**Essay One - maximum length 1000 words**

**Tell us about your experiences as a New American. Whether as an immigrant yourself, or as a child of immigrants, how have your experiences as a New American informed and shaped who you are and your accomplishments? Feel free to discuss how individual people (such as family or teachers), institutions, aspects of law, culture, society or American governance made an impact on your life as an immigrant or child of immigrants. The program is interested in understanding the context of your personal, professional, and academic accomplishments.**

I am the child of Polish immigrants, who emigrated after martial law was imposed in 1981. My dad suspended his college education and first followed my grandfather, a retired mining engineer, to Nigeria, where the latter volunteered to help build mines in underdeveloped countries. My dad then came to the United States and was granted asylum. My mom was an undergraduate studying international trade and came to the United States to earn some money while learning English. My dad and mom started their careers flipping hamburgers on Venice Beach and babysitting for wealthy families, respectively. They went on through community college, finished UC Irvine, and obtained graduate degrees. Once they met in the United States, they decided to stay and raise a family.

From an early age, I learned that my parents are hardworking people. As a research assistant for an economics professor at a local university, my mom spent time in the evenings at her computer updating his textbooks. I became knowledgeable in the field of healthcare economics as a byproduct of her telling me about her work at the dinner table. My dad, on the other hand, worked in IT at a pharmaceutical company and spent his time in the evenings preparing for presentations. When I was in elementary school, I remember him pursuing a fully-employed MBA and attending his graduation on the oceanside campus of Pepperdine University. These are shining examples of the opportunities available to New Americans with the grit to find and pursue them.

Once I matriculated at Caltech, other than the rigorous school year academic schedule, my summer research experiences were formative. After my freshman year, I worked at a physical inorganic chemistry laboratory on campus, performing simulations to study a chemical system. As a computational scientist, my calculations would finish running even after I left for the workday, so I would often look at them in the evenings. This came naturally because it was the same thing that my parents did when I was growing up. The research internship after my sophomore year, on the other hand, was different. I was still doing computational science, but this time for a quantum chemistry lab group. Furthermore, it was the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, so I was forced to do this work from home. I was lucky that my work was amenable to being done remotely, since all that I needed was a computer. Given that this was work that I was doing from the same room that I slept in and there were no social interactions with labmates to divert me after a long day of work, the progress that I was able to make on my research project was entirely dependent on my determination to check the status of my calculations throughout the day, every single day. As in my previous research internship, I was used to working outside of the typical workday, given the example of my parents.

In the middle of my junior year, I was diagnosed with leukemia and subsequently had a stroke. My cognitive faculties were left untouched by the stroke, but I have motor deficits. As my stroke took place in the brain-stem, I was initially bed-bound and could not communicate. Now, I use an assistive device, like a walker, to ambulate; my fine motor function is impaired for things like typing; and I have spastic dysarthria, or weakness in my articulators, a slower rate of speech, and difficulty changing pitch.

Following the stroke, I spent over four months hospitalized for acute rehabilitation and chemotherapy treatment. Recently, my brother and I counted that I was seen by 15 medical specialists on my oncology journey. This was done with humor on our part, but it serves to show just how comprehensive the care that I received has been in the US medical system. There has been the hematologist-oncologist who has been with me through my chemotherapy sequelae, all the way to the physiatrist who oversees the therapies that enable me to recover from my stroke. Sure, leading a healthy lifestyle and being diligent with my rehab has been helpful, but without having an evidence-based treatment plan to follow, I would have no guidance in my efforts. I realize that I have been lucky to receive this level of medical care in America.

When I first entered into acute rehab, I was informed that therapy ran from Monday till Saturday, with a break only on Sunday. I soon learned that there are no breaks if one wants to succeed in neurological rehabilitation. After all, the brain doesn't know when a workday starts or ends. When I returned home, I was determined to be diligent with rehab on my own terms. I spent most of the first year at home after my stroke doing physical rehab as my full-time occupation to become independent. Then, I discovered dictation. The ability to communicate without having to worry about the constraints of my fine motor impairment is exciting, to say the least. This enables me to take working outside of the typical workday to the next level. While I am walking on the treadmill, I am thinking about how to structure my quantum chemistry program; while I am doing aquatic physical therapy, I am planning a final report for a class; while I am taking a daily walk with trekking poles, I am writing this essay.

The only limit is that my computer does not always understand me. I frequently deal with dictation misrecognitions. For an hour each day, I do tongue twisters and then loop over a large set of phonetically-rich sentences for realistic practice. Throughout, I turn on a transcription application on my phone to get real-time feedback on how dictation software is rating my speech output.

From being a New American, I have learned the value of working overtime, which has enabled me to overcome a medical setback and achieve my goals as a scientist and person.