

Sample Essay #1

Accepted by Wellesley

It took me eighteen years to realize what an extraordinary influence my mother has been on my life. She's the kind of person who has thoughtful discussions about which artist she would most want to have her portrait painted by (Sargent), the kind of mother who always has time for her four children, and the kind of community leader who has a seat on the board of every major project to assist Washington's impoverished citizens. Growing up with such a strong role model, I developed many of her enthusiasms. I not only came to love the excitement of learning simply for the sake of knowing something new, but I also came to understand the idea of giving back to the community in exchange for a new sense of life, love, and spirit.

My mother's enthusiasm for learning is most apparent in travel. I was nine years old when my family visited Greece. Every night for three weeks before the trip, my older brother Peter and I sat with my mother on her bed reading Greek myths and taking notes on the Greek Gods. Despite the fact that we were traveling with fourteen-month-old twins, we managed to be at each ruin when the site opened at sunrise. I vividly remember standing in an empty amphitheatre pretending to be an ancient tragedian, picking out my favorite sculpture in the Acropolis museum, and inserting our family into modified tales of the battle at Troy. Eight years and half a dozen passport stamps later I have come to value what I have learned on these journeys about global history, politics and culture, as well as my family and myself.

While I treasure the various worlds my mother has opened to me abroad, my life has been equally transformed by what she has shown me just two miles from my house. As a ten year old, I often accompanied my mother to (name deleted), a local soup kitchen and children's center. While she attended meetings, I helped with the Summer Program by chasing children around the building and performing magic tricks. Having finally perfected the "floating paintbrush" trick, I began work as a full time volunteer with the five and six year old children last June. It is here that I met Jane Doe, an exceptionally strong girl with a vigor that is contagious. At the end of the summer, I decided to continue my work at (name deleted) as Jane's tutor. Although the position is often difficult, the personal rewards are beyond articulation. In the seven years since I first walked through the doors of (name deleted), I have learned not only the idea of giving to others, but also of deriving from them a sense of spirit.

Everything that my mother has ever done has been overshadowed by the thought behind it. While the raw experiences I have had at home and abroad have been spectacular, I have learned to truly value them by watching my mother. She has enriched my life with her passion for learning, and changed it with her devotion to humanity. In her endless love of everything and everyone she is touched by, I have seen a hope and life that is truly exceptional. Next year, I will find a new home miles away. However, my mother will always be by my side.

ADMISSIONS COMMITTEE COMMENTS:

The topic of this essay is the writer's mother. However, the writer definitely focuses on herself, which makes this essay so strong. She manages to impress the reader with her travel experience, volunteer and community experience, and commitment to learning without ever sounding boastful or full of herself. The essay is also very well organized.

Sample Essay #2

Accepted by Stanford

When I look at this picture of myself, I realize how much I've grown and changed, not only physically, but also mentally as a person in the last couple of years. Less than one month after this photograph was taken, I arrived at the [school's name] in [school's location] without any idea of what to expect. I entered my second year of high school as an innocent thirteen year-old who was about a thousand miles from home and was a new member of not the sophomore, but "lower-middle" class. Around me in this picture are the things which were most important in my life at the time: studying different types of cars and planes, following every move made by Tiger Woods, and seeing the latest blockbuster movies like "The Dark Knight" or "Spider Man 3." On my t-shirt is the rest of my life – golf. Midway through my senior year at the special [school's name] school, the focuses in my life have changed dramatically.

If there is one common occurrence which takes place for every single person in the diverse student body at [school's name], it is that we all grow up much faster for having lived there. I do not know whether this speeding up of the maturing process is generally good or bad, but I definitely have benefited.

The classroom has become a whole different realm for me. Before, the teachers and students alike preached the importance of learning, but it was implicitly obvious that the most important concern was grades. At [school's name] teachers genuinely believe that learning is the most important objective and deeply encourage us to collaborate with each other and make use of all resources that we may find. In fact, in a certain class this year, my teacher assigned us to prepare every day of the week to discuss a certain book; there were only two requirements in this preparation – we had to maximize our sources, gleaning from everything and everyone in the school, but we were not allowed to actually look at the book. As a result, I know more about that book than any other that I have actually read. It is teaching methods such as this which ensure that we will learn more. Indeed, this matter of "thinking" has been one of the most important aspects of my experience. Whether in Physics or English, I'm required to approach every problem and idea independently and creatively rather than just regurgitate the teacher's words. In discussion with fellow students both inside and outside of class, the complex thoughts flowing through everyone's brain is evident.

However, I believe that the most important concepts that I have espoused in being independent of my parents for half of each year, deal with being a cosmopolitan person. The school's faculty and students are conscious about keeping all of the kids' attention from being based on the school. Every single issue of global concern is brought forth by one group or another whether it be a faculty member, publication, ethnic society, or individual student. Along with being aware of issues of importance, after attending [school's name] my personality has evolved. First, my mannerisms have grown: the school stresses giving respect to everyone and everything. Our former headmaster often said, "Character can be measured not by one's interaction with people who are better off than him or herself, but by one's interactions with those who are worse off." The other prime goal of the school's community is to convert every single timid lower-classman into a loud, rambunctious senior. Basically, if you have an opinion about something, it is wrong not to voice that opinion. Of course, being obnoxious is not the idea. The key is to become a master of communication with teachers, fellow students, all of who are a part of the community, and most importantly, those who are outside of the community.

I do not want to make [school's name] sound as if it produces the perfect students, because it doesn't. But the school deserves a lot of credit for its efforts. Often, some part of the mold does remain. As the college experience approaches, I am still the same person, only modified to better maximize my talents. Although I still have some time to play tennis and see movies, perhaps one of the few similarities between this photograph and me now is my smile.

ADMISSIONS COMMITTEE COMMENTS:

This essay is fairly well written. The essayist makes boarding school his focus, using it to explain and describe how and why he has changed over the years. A lot of students write about what wonderful people they have become, but they fail to do a good job of understanding and explaining the forces that prevailed to make them change. This writer focuses on the strengths of the school itself. He demonstrates the sort of values it tries to instill in its students such as, "Encouraging us to collaborate with each other and make use of all resources that we may find," and "Giving respect to everyone and everything." Because the writer does so, the reader never doubts that the applicant possesses all the qualities that he credits to the school. Using this method has two advantages. First, the positive, upbeat attitude he has toward his institution is rare. Second, Stanford, for one, recognized that this would reflect well on his ability to adapt to and be a positive force at their school.