

Ballston Spa High School Sample College Essays

The students who submitted the included essays were accepted to the following Colleges:

Boston College

University of Connecticut

Cedarville University

University of South Alabama

University of Miami

University of Oklahoma

University of Vermont

Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute

Siena College

St. Bonaventure University

St. Lawrence University

Stockton University

State University of New York at Cobleskill

Villanova University

Calvin College

University of Alabama at Birmingham

Clarkson University

Cornell University

Fordham University

George Washington University

Gordon College

Hobart and William Smith College

Lafayette College

Northeastern University

State University of New York at Geneseo

State University of New York at Stony Brook

The massive omphalocele covered more than one half of the precious infant's fragile chest; in rural Argentina, Manuel Jesús would have stood no chance, but this hospital, in this section of Córdoba, with this medical team, gave his family a glimmer of hope. Drawn both to the rise and fall of Manuel's chest and to the physicians' dexterous hands, as the fluid drained from his body, I was inspired to make a profoundly positive impact on my future patients the way the integral members of this life-saving team were offering extended life to this critically ill little one.

"Paint and wait," interventional medical teams call it: a term that could not capture the extension of a beating heart and breathing lungs to a patient and a family that have nothing more. The procedure involved delaying major surgery until Manuel's chest cavity had grown enough to accommodate organs that clung to life outside his frail form; only the painstakingly painted application of antibiotic cream and protective wrap safeguarded him. His liver and digestive system hung in delicate balance inside a gossamer film, longing to thrive within the protected walls of a rib cage, behind a nurturing layer of skin, yet they lay there, exposed, vulnerable.

I flew the 5,500 miles back from that Projects Abroad volunteer mission, never knowing whether the "paint and wait" turned to "live and thrive" or whether that family cried as Manuel died. But I felt the hope. I experienced that chance at a future for him and for every child fortunate enough to earn that chance.

Less than twenty-four hours later, my mindset pendulum swung from a hopeful cradle to a dignified end of life. At the start of my internship at an Alzheimer's facility, I learned to adopt the goal of making a meaningful moment each day for every patient with moderate to severe dementia.

Though Loretta was capable of neither recognition nor recall, I will never forget *her*. She struck a special chord because her feistiness and sarcasm masked her rarely functional memory and cloudy processing. She screamed in protest if doctors tried to treat her, therapists tried to intervene, or orderlies attempted to change her bedding; whenever I entered the doorway, though, her eyes conveyed what words could not: "Make a meaningful moment, even if you can't give me hope." Loretta cared not about my diagnostic testing, but she liked the tone of my voice and my zest for life. Our spunky souls connected.

Both the baby boy and the elderly woman longed for a change, a difference. I yearn to afford others the possibility of hope, or at least the opportunity for momentary magic, through the well-studied science and well-practiced art of medicine.

Doors

The door to my old house was broken down and battered: faded blue paint chipping off the rough wood and a tarnished copper doorknob. Behind that door, I felt safe, surrounded by everything familiar. Life was uneventful but blissful. Then, I was forced to exit that door one last time, entering a new world with unfamiliar doors to discover.

Moving to upstate New York brought doors I wasn't expecting. Some carried nostalgic memories of past vacations to Saratoga Springs, while others were fresh and exciting. Still though, I could not help but miss my old worn door. I missed the security I once felt. I took an instant dislike to the door of my new home. A white door filled with glass windows that let the sunshine into the house; it felt too exposed compared to my old windowless door. I was open for the world to see... I felt bare.

When I opened my next door to Yaddo Gardens, a historical landmark, I could not foresee that the roses I nurtured there would, in actuality, nurture me. I did not expect to find such serenity or make such unbelievable friendships. Being the only volunteer under the age of forty, I expected difficulty in befriending people. To my surprise, I have come to love my new adopted parents there, who continue to challenge me to grow-just as the roses do.

My next door was the door to fencing class. The hardest part in opening that door was getting to it-both literally and figuratively. The door rested atop a fire escape, which I climbed in snow, ice, and rain. In addition, I did not know a soul there, or how to fence. I soon discovered that the children that attended the class were, in fact, children. I was the only high schooler in a sea of middle schoolers. At class, I learned not only the art of form, but also of befriending the young.

Finally, it was the end of my first summer and the start of my new school. Looking back on my summer, I felt like Goldilocks: friends too young and too old, but none my age. As I pushed open the door to my new school in my new navy dress, I held my head high and walked with a façade of confidence. I went from each class without a soul talking to me. Taking action into my own hands, I decided if I could befriend the elderly and the young, why not my age group? I made the decision to open myself up, just like my new door at home did. I was no longer the closed-off old door. I was the door with windows and sunlight.

Becoming like my new door has more than paid off. I have made countless friends, started a new club, joined endless new clubs, excelled in my academics, and most importantly, learned about myself.

It's ironic how the doors of my past turned out so confining. Though doors are supposed to allow the freedom to move in and out, those past doors restricted my mobility. They're closed now, but the expanse of new doors awaiting my knock is promising enough to make the loss worth it.

I no longer fear what is behind those new doors, but rather anticipate the challenge and growth to come. It is said that when a door closes, a window is opened. Though I like the sentiment of the quote, I find I must disagree. When one door closes, I have found that not just a window, but a hallway of new doors opens up. Behind the doors may be pain and suffering...or a new adventure waiting to unravel. The only way to find out is to make the decision to open the door.

"First Great White Shark Of Season Spotted Off Nauset Beach" (CBS Boston). This unfortunately seems to always be the headline we see just weeks before our annual visit. They never faze me though, because Nauset Beach is the one place where I am completely content; it is my second home, regardless of the lurking sharks. It also is the home of Liam's Clam Shack, which is amazing in not only its taste but in its ability to rob everyone on the beach, because of their ridiculous prices. However, the finger coating, greasy fried, fish and chicken is too hard to resist.

Most of my mom's family visits Cape Cod. The family includes my grandma, my four aunts, my four uncles, and my twenty-four cousins. We rent out two houses which multiple families share. This allows us to get caught up with everyone's lives and to come together and be our uncensored selves for two weeks.

Before I even reach the beach the first nose pinching smell of seaweed and salt overpower me. However it is refreshing. It is not the smell of the ocean that identifies our second home, but the ghastly smell of left over rotting Liam's along with baking baby dippers which derive from the iconic dumpster at the end of the boardwalk. After surviving that aroma, I become faced with another challenge; walking across the blazing sand. This task would be a lot easier if I could run; however, that day I had chosen to take on the role as the family pack mule. Although, the heat of the sand, like the smell of the ocean becomes soothing after you become used to it.

The initial crash of the waves followed by the sizzling aftermath becomes background noise. One is aware of the calming sounds but because they contain such a steady rhythm the noise is just like another heartbeat or another breath. It is such a soothing feeling after

conquering a year of continuous stress being a full IB student, a dedicated lacrosse player, and an active member in my community. As the waves re-enter the ocean, it is like they pull my lingering stress away. The receding waves glisten like shimmering diamonds, and because the waves do not crash simultaneously this effect lasts for eternity. The ocean is mesmerizing. I have always wanted to know what country is looking back at me. I love to travel so this thought is always on my mind while on the beach.

Each year I come back and walk the beach. It is the one place where you can literally walk in each other's footsteps. I walk behind my cousins and follow their steps on the beach as well as in life. They are my inspiration, and all of them have achieved great things. The majority of them have graduated from Ivy League schools, and were able to make their dreams reality. Even my cousin who dreamed of striking it rich married a woman who later won the lottery. Another dreamed of creating a roof top garden in New York City, and is now a founder of the Brooklyn Grange; the largest roof top garden in the world. One of my goals in life is to leave my footsteps in someplace I love. I hope to leave footsteps that people will want to walk in and follow.

Eventually though the footsteps wash away like we eventually wash away. The tides come and go. They are the heartbeat of the sea. The sea has this beat, just like us, and each year the beach changes, the same way as I had grown and changed that year. I look around at my cousins and their new lives with their new families and see how the new beach represents another one of us. It is an extension of our family. It is my favorite place.

Boring?

It was one of those rare moments in my life when I was speechless. My head was r thoughts scrambled—*what do you mean, boring? I don't understand. Wasn't it good? I thou was good enough.* And the most overwhelming thought: *what now?*

I was quickly becoming aware of how hard the chair was that I was sitting on. How college pennants were hanging on the wall. Looking anywhere but at my guidance counse while I struggled to come up with a reply. My college admission essay, that I spent so muc laboring over, was boring? I felt crushed—I worked hard and I was proud of that essay. B had missed the mark, lost the emotion, and failed to connect. I was completely blindsided response my counselor gave— After the first paragraph, she had no desire to keep reading could think was, *ouch.*

For the next couple hours, I did nothing but reflect on that first failed essay, focusi it to the point of obsession. That essay described my time at math camp. I recounted the w spent trying ridiculously hard to understand the most difficult math I'd ever seen, and my to grasp most of it. I then somewhat pompously concluded that ultimately everything we c learn is an accomplishment and there really is no failure, only opportunity to do better. Th general consensus was that while it was a good and well-written essay, it didn't stand out c represent me well and was—in several opinions—uninteresting, dull, and the rest of the

thesaurus entry for “boring”. When I was emotionally stable again the feedback made sense, but I couldn’t help noting the irony. I had failed to effectively write about failure.

I came home that day feeling down and incapable. I brought my feelings to the dinner table along with a bruised ego and a torn-apart essay. Naively, I expected my parents to alleviate my sorrows and reassure me of my ability. Instead, they challenged me to accept that it wasn’t the best essay and move on. I was defensive and all I wanted to do was justify my failure, explain that I was capable of more, and that I could fix it. My parents, of all people, thought my essay was boring too? Was anyone on my side at all? Are you there, God? It’s me, Andrea...

After a few minutes of sulking in my chicken and potatoes, I came back down to earth and realized that I was being painfully melodramatic. After abandoning the histrionics and inwardly cringing at my own behavior, my parents and I talked it out. Wasn’t the whole point of my first essay that failure didn’t really exist? If I didn’t need to learn to put myself in my writing, I probably wouldn’t have written a boring, impersonal essay in the first place.

I began working on a new idea, feeling inspired by the failure of the first one. I took it first to my parents, then my best friends and one of my club advisors. Having found the support that I thought I’d lacked when emotional and out of sorts, I knew that this was the opportunity I was looking for all along. I sat down at my computer and began to write my story of the time my guidance counselor told me my college essay was boring, how I learned to take my own advice, and most importantly, the time I was reminded that failure is not a dead end, but another opportunity on the path to success.

I like to walk barefoot outside. On days when the sun makes the pavement burn like hot coals, the blades of dew-covered grass are a cool welcome to my weathered feet. The farm offers me many places to walk. Along a flowing creek, through red barns, out in the shaded woods, but especially in the garden is where I feel perfectly content.

Every year it begins the same way. On spring evenings I walk barefoot, sliding through the grass and out toward the garden. My soles feel their surroundings, whether it is the rough and uneven ground when I rake rocks, the tremor of the soil when my mallet hits a stake, or the soft dirt enveloping my feet as I drop the tiniest of seeds into their holes. I bring the palettes from the greenhouse, take the tomatoes and peppers out of their 6-celled homes, and see the web of roots that was confined in the plastic. I set the roots free.

Weeks pass, rows pop up, leaves multiply. Keeping up with the weeds proves a tedious task at best. I spend hours crouching next to the earth, feet sinking in the soil, being the kingmaker in the rectangle of dirt.

Later in the summer, plastic bags and bushel baskets run in short supply as my time is spent collecting produce. Picking a few rows of beans teaches me lessons of bounty, patience, and camouflage. I enjoy seeing all of the colors intermixed. Yellow squashes brush against red tomatoes, green peas, orange peppers, and purple eggplant. Every so often, I see a section fall prey to disease or insects, but the loss of one arch cannot tear down the whole rainbow.

In the fall I return to school and free time is less frequent. Without restraint, the weeds rise tall over waning vegetables. They are efficient in the art of suffocation, of effective reproduction. When I get the chance I wander out, and my feet brush through

the grass as I walk the perimeter of the garden. Day by day the weeds form a block of chaotic vegetation, a striking contrast with the manicured lawn surrounding it. The plants prepare for the day when the frost settles on the ground, the tractor rumbles, and they are tilled back under the earth, leaving their progeny for the spring to come.

Every moment of every day we grow and change. We are intent on shaping our surroundings, but in reality, our surroundings shape us. It is often the place that we feel perfectly content that can teach us the most, because it becomes a part of us. Needless to say, the garden has taught me a lot.

Some nights I walk out and find my feet sinking in wet mud. Other nights they are supported by dry, powdery dirt. I have abundance all around me, but I must sow my own seeds and tend to the plants that pop up. Weeds will always be there, persistent, recurrent, and demanding to be dealt with. As much as I feel that I have control of my life, sometimes I must yield to the uncontrollable. My life is full of diversity; embracing it not only allows me to experience a rainbow of opportunities, but also offers protection from my own personal blights. When it comes to getting my feet dirty, I can worry about the cleanup later. For now, I just keep going one barefoot step at a time.