



Duke University

- Accepted College Essay -

BACON

The alarm clock is, to many high school students, a wailing monstrosity whose purpose is to torture all who are sleep-deprived. Those who believe this are misguided, and are simply viewing the situation from a twisted perspective. For when these imprudent early-risers blearily rub their eyes each morning, and search in vain for whatever is making that earsplitting noise, they are, without a doubt, annoyed. Why?

It isn't because the only thing they desire is to sleep a few extra hours, as many would presume. No, these kids are groggy and irritable because they are waking up to what they think will be another horribly boring day of school. If one of these foolish Sallys or Joes were, say, sleeping comfortably on a Saturday morning, I could certainly see something different happening. A beautiful breakfast of tantalizing vittles—eggs, hash browns, and the like—would be ready and waiting for them on their kitchen tables. But the scrumptious delight to outshine them all would be a slab of bacon, piled proudly for the taking. It would be that wafting, wondrous bacon smell that would draw dear, sweet Sally abruptly from her slumber—long before an alarm clock has the chance to pierce the air.

Oh, bacon: what a marvelous, glorious thing! I live for those heart-stoppingly good strips of succulence, so crispy and crunchy, so packed with perfection. The thought of having a plate of bacon every day, perhaps every school day, sends me into sheer waves of ecstasy!

To be sure, many others would also wax poetic about this lovely breakfast food. But precious few would share this same zeal for learning. I, however, can smugly decree that I do regard both very highly. I brightly waken every morning to the mellifluous joy that sounds from my alarm clock, a huge smile plastered on my face, and the yearning to learn in my heart.

When I board my school bus Monday through Friday, it is still pitch black outside. Busmates will groan about how even the day has not yet dragged itself out of bed; I only chuckle through their thirty-minute rant fest as we chug down the freeway. Opting to be part of a faraway Magnet school, after all, has its benefits. My peers may still not look forward to waking up earlier, but when we are all together in a classroom, we take on the “bacon mentality.” I have the opportunity to choose from a wealth of diverse classes, and love arriving to school each day with the prospect of having a new Spanish History lesson—taught to me in Spanish, for a change. Teachers, driven by the enthusiasm of their Magnet students, are inspired to create new classes for advanced students, including those who have completed AP Spanish Literature and are still eager to learn more, or those who want to learn about a specific aspect of a subject—we now have a Middle Eastern History class. Not to be outdone, the post-AP exam period of my English Language class included an intensive literature study, where we laughed at good ol' Yossarian in *Catch-22*, and developed a strong attachment to Jay Gatsby. I'd like to think that *The Great Gatsby's* pursuit of Daisy is not unlike my own pursuit of bacon. I've gobbled up new knowledge rapidly, hankering after it like any elusive bacon strip, and happily digesting any new bits of information.

But six classes a year are simply not enough to satisfy my hunger for knowledge. Just as I eat bacon all three meals of the day (when possible), I attempt to learn all days of the week. Rather than make another trip to some lackluster movie theatre on the weekend, I dedicate my time to reading another good book, or reviewing Economics with my friends. But high school is starting to smell like leftovers to me now; I want fresh, new, crisp learning. I want not to read a textbook written by a renowned professor: I want to hear him speak directly. I'm ready for the university, and hunger for all the new opportunities waiting for me! I've finished my breakfast, and now it's time to get going to school.

PRECIOUS PLANET

“Hello! What’s your name?” “Pen-Yuan Hsing.” I see The Expression, then hear The response: “What?” Starting the first grade in the US without knowing a single word of English, going back to Taiwan three years later incapable of recognizing a single Chinese character is not exactly an ideal circumstance for blending in. For many years, I was always the quiet one sitting in the corner, the one who few people talked to, the one out of the loop. I was the “local alien.”

I opt to join the Earth Science Club during my first year in Lishan High School, as I always had an interest in astronomy, which happened to be the focus of that year’s club activities. I didn’t know the weekly gathering time of our club was also an elective Earth Science course that students from other high schools could attend. I certainly did not realize what a big impact this arrangement would have on me.

Near the end of the first semester, I was approached by a girl from a neighboring school who attended this earth science course. She asked if I wanted to join her on an environmental survey of Taiwan’s Keelung coast conducted by an organization called Taipei Wetnet. For a moment I hesitated, I literally had no experience in responding to invitations. What suddenly came out of my mouth surprised me, “Sure, what time?”

For the next three years I spent in Taipei Wetnet, I gained not only a close friend, knowledge about the problems our environment faced, but perhaps most importantly found a group of people who shared the same convictions, who are passionate about the same thing, the plight of our precious planet. A year after being introduced to this organization, I was its coordinator and presented my first academic paper at an environmental education conference. I learned that I don’t always have to be the quiet one in the corner, that I do and can have things to share with everyone else. I don’t have to fear.

I often think about how I managed to say yes on that fateful day. Was it just because of a pretty face? Or maybe there has always been a special part of me that wanted to get out, and she was instrumental in “flipping the switch.” This eye-opening experience and what I learned from it is what I desperately want to share with the world.

Perhaps, somewhere out there is another quiet person in the corner just waiting to be found. A switch waiting to be flipped. You just have to find it, flip it, and make the world a brighter, warmer place.

ANYTHING GOES

I have always been comfortable with Tae Kwon Do, music, art, and friends. However, as a horse in Chinese astrology, I also need to explore different pursuits, and step outside of my comfort zone. This summer, I ventured beyond the pasture of my comfort zone, and participated onstage in the high school summer musical for the first time.

The biggest challenge of taking this leap was overcoming my own mental barrier—the sign that read, Jean, you have never had a dance lesson; you have no idea how to sing or act. Out of fear that I would feel uncomfortable, I believed that playing violin in the pit orchestra was my calling. However, after three years of pit orchestra experience, I longed to shine in that coveted spotlight. I did not tell my friends about how I wondered what it would feel like to act onstage in front of eight hundred people. When I saw that the title of the musical for this past summer was Anything goes, I knew that no one would think worse of me for following my aspirations. Confident that my friends would encourage me, I let go of my cautious Chinese approach to life, and let the free-spirited horse within me escape.

Despite my decision to participate in the musical, I was terrified. I wondered whether I would meet any friends and if I would be able to learn to sing and dance well. My fears were intensified because I missed the first week of rehearsals while at a leadership conference in New York City. When I attended my first rehearsal, arriving directly from New York City, my fortitude kept me steady. With confidence and New York City memories in my heart, I joined the rest of the cast and reveled in the excitement. I followed my new friends with a passion for an art form that I hardly knew, but willingly embraced.

From that moment on, I was a horse freely cantering around an open meadow. I had discovered a new point of view, and the grass was greener than it had ever seemed. Some days, I came home with new dance steps to show my parents. On other days, I drew the designs of my costumes when my descriptions at the dinner table would not suffice. The make-up artist tried three times to find the right blush, while the hair team created a different style for me each night. Having to think up a new hairstyle each time was parallel to my shifting opinion of my life and self. Although participating in the musical was initially petrifying, I discovered that taking such a risk was the optimal way to grow and change.

Now, I will not shy away from being in a musical cast because my comfort zone is expanding. Soon it will encompass the grand scope of my interests: from singing and dancing to throwing a sales pitch in front of judges; from learning how to execute precision front-flips to building my favorite piano repertoire; from designing a webpage to arranging chamber music, or developing optics technologies. Such passions will continue to define who I am and what I hope to achieve. My character is being shaped and reshaped by my learning experiences because I am an impressionable human being. As I continue to explore, I know that my interests will solidify into a cohesive whole. Until then, I seek to enrich myself with new opportunities and never look back.

CRIME SCENE REPORT

Crime Scene Report

Crime: Missing Person

Location: Duke University, 2138 Campus Drive, Box 90586, Durham, North Carolina 27708-0586

Time: October 2, 2008, 11:00 A.M.

Investigated by: Admissions Officers of Duke University

Case Description:

On the morning of October 2, 2008, at precisely 7:00 A.M., a Miss Lauren Sanders began to worry. Her future-self entered the gates of a prestigious university in the fall of 2009 and had not returned home. Miss Sanders filed a missing person's report, hoping someone could help her to locate her future-self in a world of possibilities.

The case began with a grueling interrogation of Miss Lauren Sanders, the person who knew most about her future-self. However, the questioning session yielded little information. Miss Sanders could not fully describe herself in the future. Pressured, she stated that "she has the ambition to fulfill all of her goals, is both stubborn and industrious, and wants to experience University life." Miss Sanders lacked a photograph of her future-self, but remarked that "she has brown hair, likes to describe herself as vertically-challenged, and is usually smiling."

NOTE: While unable to describe her future-self, Miss Sanders believed that examination of past experiences could possibly assist the admissions officers in the case. According to Miss Sanders, her future-self has "volunteered in her community and traveled on a global scale."

Physical evidence collected during a thorough search of Miss Sander's bedroom included a Dell laptop, a collection of Jane Austin novels, worn textbooks, and an I-pod. Fingerprinting analysis and DnA processing determined that these items belong to both Miss Sanders and her future-self, and that they use these items frequently. Despite biological traces of the future-self found within the home, laboratory analysis concluded that Miss Sanders' future-self does not reside within her hometown.

With information gathered from the physical search of Miss Sanders' home and Miss Sanders' interrogation, a database search was conducted to determine possible universities in which Miss Sanders' future-self resided. Within minutes, Duke University appeared as a match.

With this lead, authorities conducted numerous searches at Duke University in Durham, North Carolina, probing the dorms, library, and classrooms. All searches yielded nothing, yet the possibility of finding Miss Sanders' future-self remains strong. Professors and students alike, when questioned about Miss Sanders' future-self, strongly believe that many individuals like her come to the University to find their potential paths.

Further examination will be needed to complete this investigation, including a thorough inspection of Miss Sanders' resume and letters of recommendation. Hopefully, the leads that we have will direct us to the whereabouts of her future-self.

NOTE: According to Miss Sanders, the future-self plans to travel on a foreign-exchange student program and hopes to conduct research in one of the many labs available to undergraduates. At present, these areas have not been searched by professionals.

On the morning of October 2, 2009, at precisely 7:04 A.M., the admissions officers found Miss Lauren Sanders' future-self at Duke University. She had hidden in the incoming student body.

JOHN NASH

After spending a week with John Nash, I may have stumbled upon a central purpose of my life. Well, not Nobel Laureate John Nash himself, but whenever I describe Fred, their characteristics seem quite parallel. Fred is unique, possessing an indomitable spirit to fulfill his dreams without fear of failure. Not only is he the most brilliant young man I have ever met, he exhibits a genuinely compassionate heart. Sadly, many people may never recognize Fred as the beautiful individual that he is, or what he has to offer. While our society may call him “challenged,” I have come to recognize him as an unexpected role model. For Fred, you see, is autistic. He does not interact well with people, and is often unable to express his thoughts clearly or articulately. He doesn’t understand why people laugh at him. Yet even so, Fred is blessed with an acute sense of purpose and caring that is unmatched by most—including perhaps even the most altruistic among us.

Several years ago I traveled with a small group of Fairfax County high school students to Portland, Oregon to compete as a Finalist in the Intel International Science and Engineering Fair. I was excited at what was certain to be an experience of a lifetime—having no clue that the most valuable lesson would come not from the Science Fair itself, but from Fred. Because of my prior experiences in working with special needs children, the school administrators asked me to room with Fred during the trip. I distinctly recall my initial anxiety and reluctance about the prospect of taking care of another individual during the stressful, high-pressure atmosphere of the competition. In retrospect, though, this was the beginning of an incredible journey for both of us—but especially for me.

Fred’s passion—actually more of an obsession—is theoretical mathematics. He eats, breathes, talks, and probably sleeps mathematics, to the point where he annoys others by his constant chatter about it. His idea of fun is solving differential equations on a napkin in a fancy restaurant, oblivious to others wanting to socialize or relax. That Fred is brilliant is unquestioned, a fact that was clearly evidenced in his science project where he solved a math problem previously believed by experts to be insolvable. Yet in his own mind Fred firmly believed his entire *raison d’être* in life was the pursuit of math—and that he was destined to use his incredible mathematical ability to help make the world better.

However, Fred’s disabilities were only a fraction of the challenges that faced him. Growing up in a dysfunctional home, he suffered from a lack of love and patient understanding. Still, Fred’s life revolved around his relationships and mathematics. Although he has few close friends, people are indescribably important to him, and he always treated them with sensitivity and compassion. Unfortunately, some people—including but not limited to his peers (who can sometimes be quite cruel)—are unable to set aside their prejudices long enough to see his uniqueness as the incredible gift that it is. His enthusiasm and his indomitable spirit in the face of adversity taught me valuable lessons—lessons I will carry with me for the rest of my life. He taught me to live for what you truly cherish, to be passionate about your dreams, and to always smile in both the service of others and adversity. He has shown me the truest meaning of love for others, and the ability to understand and always live for what is important. A trip that started with me “taking care of him” turned into a trip of substantial personal discovery.

Children with special needs have powerful talents, and if we could only open our hearts to hear their voices, we would learn what it means to live without conventional boundaries. I have lived a week with a genius, not only of the mind, but more importantly, of the heart—and my life has been permanently changed because of Fred.

MUSIC AS MY SECOND LANGUAGE

Music has shaped my personal and intellectual life in many ways. Music is a common language that connects me to others who share my enthusiasm for creating it. Furthermore, I learn about my own preferences and personality through the pieces that intrigue me. As I expose myself to a wider array of styles and eras, my musical tastes grow more complex. Through music, I welcome opportunities to expand my friendships as well as my instrumental horizons.

I began studying piano at age six. For the next five years, my mother lived vicariously through my musical education, which her family had not been able to afford. In fifth grade, as I was becoming an earnest piano student, I was selected to commence violin lessons and play in my elementary school orchestra. From that day on, I saw life from a violinist's point of view.

Although I am a seasoned pianist, an ambitious solo violinist, and a fledgling cellist, I am, above all, a passionate chamber musician. My experience in a chamber quartet has had a strong impact on my character. When I was the second violinist, I simply enjoyed making music with my friends. Only after I became the first violinist did I feel the responsibility of leadership settling uncomfortably on my shoulders. However, the burden soon became a part of me and transformed into enthusiasm. Now, as the quartet leader, I use the small group setting to channel each of our individual creative instincts. Each member of the quartet shares her musical interests, bringing favorite repertoire to the table, so that we each participate in the learning and playing experience. The quartet is also an outlet for my musical fancy. Ever since I discovered the Finale music writing software, I have delighted in arranging works for our quartet to play and perform. This year, my goal is to arrange and perform the Ferrante and Teicher version of the love theme from The Godfather for a piano duet and orchestra.

As my aspirations grow, I aim to arrange music for a greater variety of instruments and to explore jazz, pop, and other styles of music on the piano. I desire to join others with similar talent and passion at Duke. However, before I leave my high school, I hope my appreciation for music will leave a mark on my community.

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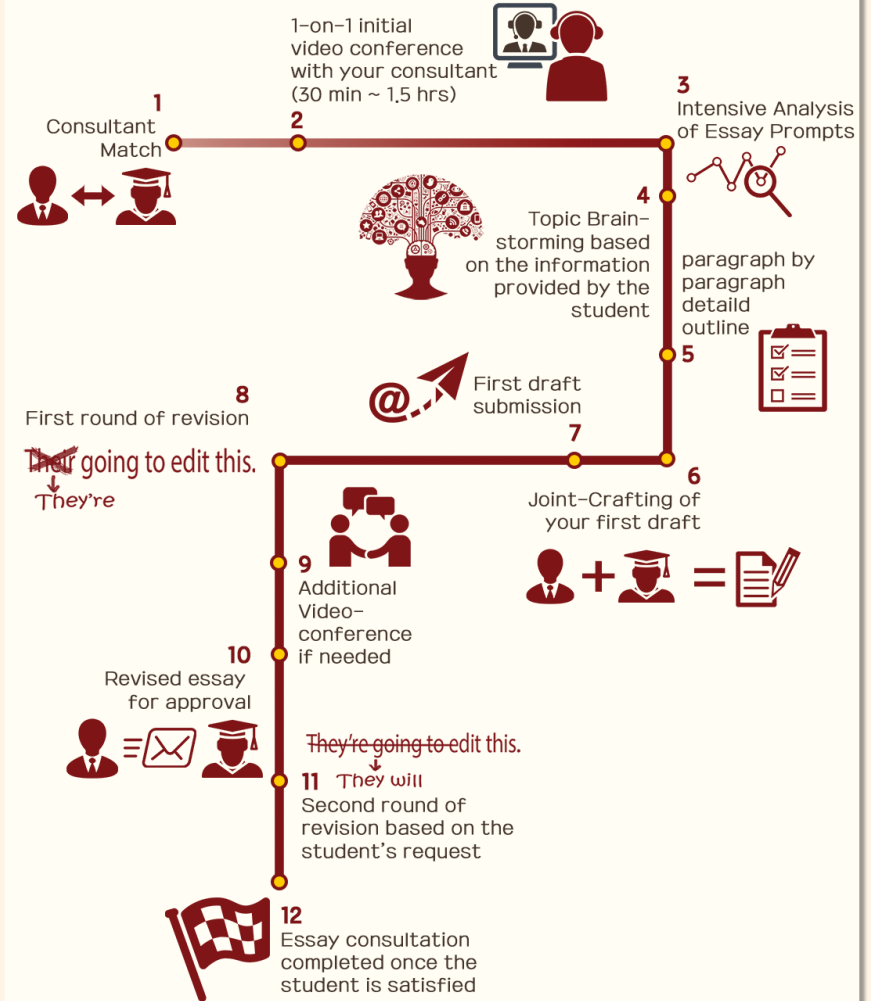
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