

Vanderbilt University

- Accepted College Essay -

"Oh, Brother"

Toddlers with buzz-cuts. Shirts tucked in. Shorts pulled high. Matching outfits chosen by Mommy. From the beginning, my brother and I have been incessantly competing with and compared to each other. Although Bryce is nearly two years older, adults frequently thought we were twins because we were about the same height and almost identical as young boys. While I no longer have to worry about people mistaking the two of us physically, I am still ensnared by the inescapable expectations and unbelievable pressure of being Bryce Taylor's younger brother.

Our competition, which consisted of underwater breath-holding contests and one-on-one basketball games, was once among the most memorable and pleasant aspects of my childhood. But as we matured and began replacing our pretend school sessions with AP classes and our play-room football contests with Friday night varsity games, the self-imposed struggle within my soul to match my brother's achievements began to escalate at an unhealthy rate.

Bryce was as close to a Greek god as anyone could be in high school. As starting running back on the football team, Bryce was one of the strongest weight-lifters on the team, one of the only players to start on varsity all four years of high school, and one of the key contributors on our school's first State Championship team his junior year. When he passed down his #10 jersey to me upon his graduation, it symbolized the demand for me to live up to his seemingly unattainable success as an athlete.

In the classroom, Bryce set an even higher standard than on the football field. Graduating as valedictorian of his class (I'm only salutatorian), scoring perfect 5's on all but one of his seven AP exams (I had only two 5's and one 3 after my junior year), and becoming a National Merit Finalist (I'm Commended), Bryce not only set a high bar, he set it as high as it could possibly go.

However, at graduation, I did notice his speech was dry and he looked uncomfortable speaking in front of an audience. Then it hit me—that boy is not perfect! He would rather be alone reading a book than surrounded by friends. Bryce refused to attend his senior float building (a social event for class bonding) until his classmates literally dragged him to the site. I am completely different, a "people person" who cannot spend enough time with friends and feels at ease when addressing a crowd.

Formerly, I viewed my brother's success as a burden on me to perform at an equally high level, which only led to unnecessary disappointment, stress, and anger. But after realizing the stupidity and futility of comparing myself to Bryce, I was finally able to celebrate his achievements and concentrate on making the most of my gifts without caring how they measure up to those of my brother. I learned to be comfortable with who I am. I meet my own expectations.

Bryce's dream to study at a prestigious university (Yale) was outside my scope a few years ago. He enlarged my reality, challenged me to transcend my comfort zone, and taught me to suppress my delusions of inadequacy. Because Bryce dared to aim for the unreachable and aspired to do great things, he set the ultimate example for me and taught me never to set a limit on myself or on my own dreams.

My brother's accomplishments now serve as a stimulus for me to do everything with passion and excellence, not as my definitive criterion for achievement. What many of my friends think is a curse—being Bryce Taylor's little brother—is actually an incomparable blessing. It has pushed me to soar above the mediocrity and apathy holding many teenagers back and to become a focused and relentless individual. The competitive spirit engendered within me as an over-achiever's brother forced me to excel when I didn't feel like it or thought I couldn't do it. In my case, sibling rivalry was not detrimental but served as a constructive force in my life.

I find it ironic that after all these years of looking up to my brother, he now must look up to me because I am a few inches taller. Oh, and by the way, my pants were never pulled up as high as Bryce's—I've always had more style.

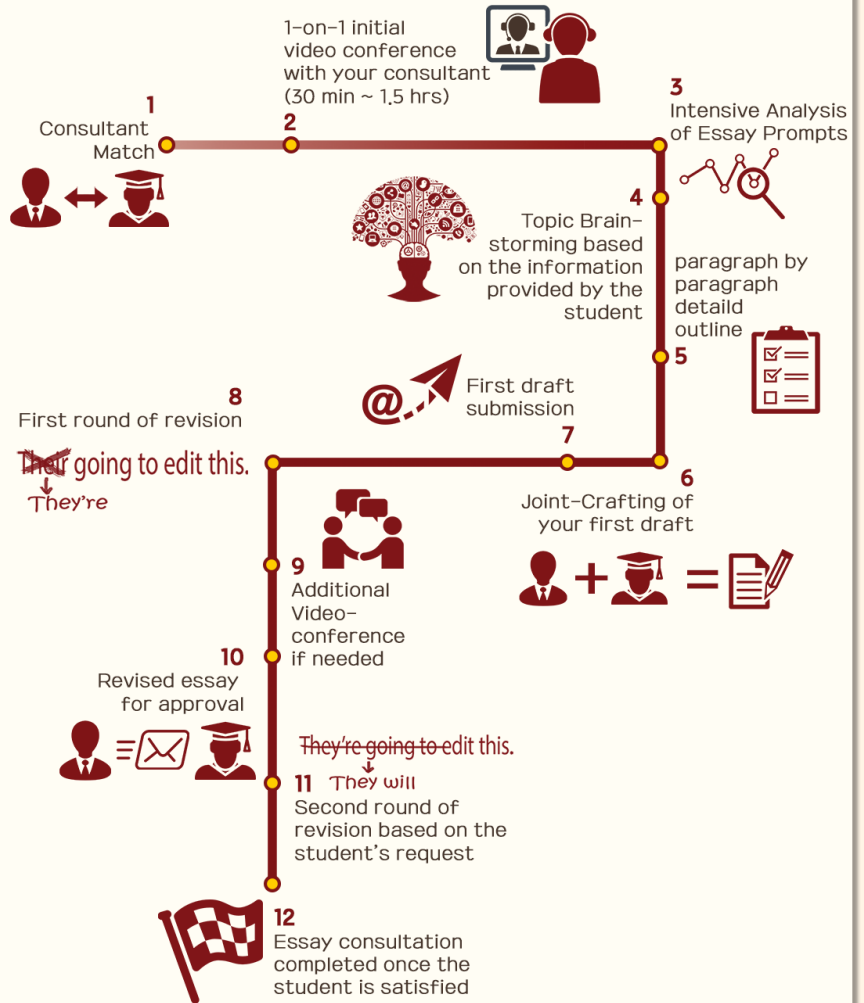
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