

# Essay 1

The smell of a hospital is very distinct. My first memory of that scent was in first grade, when I ended up in a sterile room with blood gushing from the newly-bitten hole in my lip onto my white shirt. I remember the doctors and nurses hovering over me as they stitched up my lip and warned me not to skip monkey bars again. I remember trying to talk to them as they sewed the hole up which would form a scar closely resembling a lightning bolt. I remember everything from that day. Why? Easy, it was quite possibly the best day I'd ever had. That day introduced me to the life of a doctor, and it looked AWESOME. It opened up my world into the intricacies of the human body, and the possibility of endless learning and inventions to improve quality of life. I wanted to help others as I had been helped; and from that day on I knew I wanted to smell that peculiar hospital scent every day for the rest of my life.

Growing up with a knack for injuring myself, I frequented doctor's offices like an elderly person frequents bathrooms. "Oh look, it's our favorite patient, Hannah, back again!" or "Hannah, what did you do *this* time?" were basically my mantras. Every time I went back, I fell in love all over again. There was no question that I would do anything else with my life.

As I grew older and more vertically skilled, it would be common for me to suddenly "fall ill" or "hurt my elbow" in an attempt to miss school and head to the doctor's office for another whiff of that unmistakable aroma. No, it's not because I disliked learning, but because I loved it. I loved going to the doctor's office and listening to them talk about antibiotics, bacteria, or how to make an elbow splint. And I could never get enough. I learned so much from the doctors and nurses about my passions that school became secondary. I admired how doctor's had the knowledge to help endless patients and create a healthier society.

How I see it, it's a perfect symbiotic relationship. The doctor gets to follow their passions and do what they love, and the patients get a better quality of life. It's the only way you can be completely selfish yet totally selfless all at the same time.

In March of 2015, I had the opportunity to do a full time internship with the very orthopedic surgeon that repaired my hand...and operated on my leg (I'm apparently still pretty accident prone). I was again reunited with that integral antiseptic scent that spurred me to force as much knowledge of human anatomy into my brain as possible. I was able to watch surgeries, interact with patients, and see all aspects of what a day in the life of a doctor is like. Yes, it's difficult and demanding work, but compared to what patients receive in return, the work is a minor side effect. This internship showed me what it would be like on the other side of the knife, and that I would never be bored with a job like this. My knowledge would be ever-growing and the problems in need of being solved would never end.

After all these years, I never cease to be amazed of the body's intricacies and how something so rudimentary has more details than we might ever be able to comprehend. We are never done learning. There are no concepts that have been explored to their full extent. That is why I want to be a doctor- so I can start something and never have to worry about it coming to an end. That pungent smell of antiseptic isn't just the smell of sanitation, it's the smell driving me to fulfill my passions.

## Essay 2

### **Discuss an accomplishment or event, formal or informal, that marked your transition from childhood to adulthood within your culture, community, or family.**

When I stepped off the plane into the crowded, oversized London Heathrow Airport, I had no idea what to expect. Never before had I traveled beyond my own country's borders, and never before had I traveled alone. I followed the herd through the bent white hallways to the tremendous baggage claim area, and waited. Many people came and went, but I only remember the staff members in their bright green and yellow vests. I found my bag and heaved it up onto my shoulders. As I made my way through the double doors, the old fears came back. One stood out amongst all the others: *What if I don't fit in?* Finally I saw my sign, CamTrad (Cambridge Tradition), written in blue on plain white stock. Then the true adventure began.

Much like *The Hobbit* it started slowly, with introductions and other awkward dialogue. Then we boarded our bus and prepared for the few hour trip from London to the town of Cambridge. However I still clung to that fear, and it wasn't until later in my saga that I felt truly accepted. Fortunately my path didn't involve wargs, wizards, or orcs, just a game of twister.

I'd fallen in with a New Yorker, a guy from Kentucky, a Virginian, an Aussie, and a Canadian descended from India. We'd already played half a dozen icebreakers together and were beginning to understand each other. Twister was our final stop. Four of us hopped on the only mat while the fifth spun the needle. With that many people, we quickly became a tangled mess: arms and legs snaked over, under, and in between. Suddenly the Aussie fell and took the Kentucky boy with him. Now it was just Jake from Virginia, Alexandra from New York, and I, the small town Coloradan.

"Right hand, green," announced Jai, our Canadian. It was my turn; green was the farthest color from me. I reached, slipped, and toppled our entire precarious pile. There were a few silent seconds, and then we all burst into laughter, and my shy, unsure, awkward self shattered.

I went to England to spend a month studying at Jesus College Cambridge, but what I learned was more valuable than anything that can be taught in a classroom. I gained what had been holding me back and keeping me from growing up: self-confidence. If I could earn in a single moment some of my closest most diverse friends, surely I could do anything else. I learned to leave my comfort zone and after four weeks of living outside of it, surrounded by hundreds of people from dozens of nationalities, I found that I didn't want to put one toe back into that comfort zone. I didn't want to go back to the way things were. I didn't want to leave.

I thought that getting back home would be easier than getting to England. I was dead wrong. I'd cried three times when we started loading back onto the busses. That caravan that had once been like a parade was now more akin to a funeral march.

Despite the pain of leaving that day, I wouldn't trade that experience for anything. I was leaving behind my friends, and what felt like an entire chapter of my life's story. Leaving felt like losing a piece of myself, but what remained was infinitely improved. I'd uncovered a deep, burning passion for travel and learned not only how to live on my own, but how to be myself and live in the world, not just one small segment. A wise man once said that a story is only finished when it's abandoned, and I refuse to let this tale end.

## Essay 3

The sun rays filter through the audience, beaming tangled fragments of sunshine into my eyes and across my fretboards. The faces in front of me flicker smiles as people chatter amongst themselves, tossing expectant glances my way - blind to the nerves sprouting in my stomach and knotting themselves through my hands and calloused fingertips. Breathing deeply, I adjust my microphone and begin to pluck the worn, copper strings of my guitar. I shut my eyes, blocking out the expectant gazes and wrinkled eyebrows. Relinquishing my reservations, I pour my soul into the microphone in front of me.

When I held my first guitar, I was a wide-eyed five year old with a brown mop of hair and missing teeth. If you had asked me who my favorite musician was I would have thought of Bob Dylan, the Grateful Dead, or a local bluegrass band of Birkenstock-wearing, twenty-something year old hippie boys. However, most likely, I wouldn't have answered. I might have whispered something, smiled uneasily, and continued about my business. I was shy growing up, still am. Accordingly, my parents were more than a little surprised when I informed them I wanted to be a musician. However, as two avid music enthusiasts, both only able to play the record player, they were ecstatic. Immediately, we went to the local music shop in pursuit of a guitar. We found a beautiful baby Martin. It was fascinating, magnetic, and foreign. Sitting in that music shop, ringlets toppling into my eyes as I clumsily hugged that guitar, thrilled parents hovering behind, I couldn't imagine how much that instrument would come to mean to me.

My first guitar lesson can best be described as anticlimactic. There was no magic the moment I strummed a mangled G chord, no moment where the light encapsulated me in wonderment. Just five-year old me and a balding guy, Richard, crammed in a tiny room producing a cringeworthy attempt of Three Blind Mice. Little, sweaty fingers grasping at notes that just didn't want to be formed.

It was strenuous and uncomfortable, but I relished every second of it. That room became my safe haven, Richard, someone to look up to, and later, befriend. He taught me how to read music, play the classics, pick old Irish folk tunes, and solo in the blues. More than that, Richard versed me in believing in myself: he cheered me up, cheered me on, and taught me the power of music. For thirty minutes every Wednesday, for a large portion of my life, reality didn't exist outside of that room.

At fourteen, my mom coerced me into joining a rock band - an all boys rock band. Until then, performing wasn't a reality for me. Music was something raw and personal. However, being part of the band meant penciling gigs into my haphazard, freshman life. At our first gig, we rocked a half-empty, dimly-lit dive (the majority of the audience consisted of beaming, too-proud parents). However, something unexpected happened that night: I came alive. Sharing my voice, and really, myself, was a completely new experience, a new way of connecting with people. I was hooked.

Whether I'm playing in front of hundreds of strangers or a few close friends, the feeling of having every eye in the room on me is one of angst and bewilderment; I doubt that will wane and hope it never does. Nerves stream through me every time I perform, but there's no time I feel more at home and more sure of who I am. Music gives me a way to authentically engage and connect with the world - it's the only time I can completely let myself go - becoming the truest form of myself. Sharing that with people is wholly terrifying and utterly euphoric. I can thank music for turning the mop-headed, diffident girl into the woman who can speak her thoughts and sing her heart without reservation.

## Essay 4

“A whole new world...” my voice, thin and hesitant, echoes back to me through my headphones. My entire four years of life had been comprised of me singing quietly to myself when I thought nobody could hear, and visiting the museum was my first time experiencing microphones and sound systems. It is amazing. I have my own private room where I could sing *Aladdin* to my heart's desire and not worry about an audience.

But I didn't know the on-air sign was illuminated.

Walking out into the lobby, I am perplexed by the applause, not only from my family but also from every single other family who happened to be in the museum's "recording studio." Mortified, I realize I had been broadcasting to the lobby the entire time. I am embarrassed at the thought that all of these strangers had heard me sing and feel betrayed by my family who had, for some reason, failed to tell me that *everyone* could hear me.

I kept on singing though, with that high and unsteady falsetto, until I became the lead singer to an eighth-grade jazz band. In training, my vocal instructor helped me learn to sing with power and authority: what she termed my "football mom" voice. My confidence and self-worth bloomed along with my vocal range. I pushed myself out of the shy corner and onto center stage.

From this vantage point, I nervously fiddle with my sweater as hordes of people stream through the park gates, eager to see the opening band for the Telluride Jazz Festival's Sunday lineup. The beginning chords to *Besame Mama* echo through the park, and the laid-back nature of the tune relaxes my nerves and I hesitantly sway to the music. Before long, our drummer begins to tap out the beat for *Get Away* by Earth, Wind, and Fire. The lyrics of the lead line roll off my tongue and I begin to dance, reflecting my energy onto the audience.

Along with the excitement of performing, music is redemptive. Through trial and error, I found that the only true way to express myself is through composing songs. My flaws and insecurities burst through my fingers and fall onto the page, highlighting everything about me that can be fixed. The page takes on a life of its own and organizes itself into a verse, a chorus, and finally a bridge. I pick up my guitar and strum a few chords. The words are now a song that I play over and over, etching it into my memory while simultaneously releasing the black feelings that had previously consumed me.

Putting struggles to words helps me deal with stresses constructively, and combined with my "football mom" confidence, I have transformed myself. I am now able to throw myself into the world and not be afraid of the bruises I will undoubtedly receive. Confidence has given me freedom in my body, voice, and ideas, and I am no longer worried about judgments or accusations. Performance takes on a whole new meaning to me: a way to define myself to the world. Through my music people can discover who I am and how I think.

Performing boosts my confidence, and songwriting provides an expressive outlet. Music is a constant means of support as well as a teacher to me. While I don't see myself pursuing music as a profession, my life is and always will be directly tied to music and performance. I have transformed from the four-year-old in a museum, afraid to sing even in front of my family, to the woman I am now, illuminating the on-air sign and seizing every opportunity I can get to show the world my voice.