**Entrance Essay – Mentor Text #1**

***Makes notes on the essay to show your understanding of the writer’s moves: organization, word choice, sentence structure, voice, literary devices…***

Taking my place near the end of the line, I glanced nervously at the hundreds of people waiting in front of me. What had I gotten myself into? My mind raced, trying to think of excuses to leave as I spent every minute worrying about how awkward I might feel, how I don’t know how to dance, and how uncomfortable the whole night would be. Before I knew it, the end of the line became the beginning, and my turn arrived. “Brett,” I heard a woman say. “This is Melissa. She’s going to be your date for the evening.” I took a deep breath, summoning every ounce of confidence inside me while furiously trying to hide the insecurity plastered all over my face. I introduced myself, “Hi Melissa. It’s so good to meet you. Are you ready to have some fun?” I took hold of her wheelchair’s handles—and we were off.

Plagued with cerebral palsy, Melissa was one of hundreds of adults with special needs who came that night for an evening of food, games, and dancing. I volunteered to accompany one of the guests as her date throughout the night’s various activities. The evening culminated in an hour or two on the dance floor, where I rocked and swayed Melissa to the sound of “Tiny Dancer,” and helped move her arms to the shouts of “Y-M-C-A!” It was one of the most memorable nights of my life, and I spent more than an hour of it standing in line, desperately trying to find a way out.

Looking back on that night, it is startling that I ended up volunteering as one of the guests’ dates. Whereas friends and family have always been quick to label me an overly confident extrovert, I spent years putting on a facade to hide a boy riddled with insecurities. Always finding myself the smallest, scrawniest boy in my class quickly wore out what confidence I had. Being the physical outlier amongst my peers affected my self-esteem more than I wanted to admit, and although I did my best to hide my insecurity, even simple things would make my knees weak with anxiety. Needless to say, a one-on-one date with someone I had never met—someone with a severe disability—was as far out of my comfort zone as I could possibly go.

When I heard my name called that evening I was forced to make a choice. It was not just a decision about whether or not I would stay—it was a decision about what kind of person I would be. And when I made that choice—when I decided to confront my anxiety and leave my worries about my comfort zone by the wayside—I found a spirit inside me eager and excited to spend the evening with someone less fortunate than myself.

Life is full of irony, and so it seems fitting that my crippling insecurity came face to face with a woman whose disability left her stranded with virtually no control over her own body. My feelings of alienation over a physical appearance I thought made me “too different” seemed childish and absurd, and it was that night that I finally realized just how rich my life was. This was more than an appreciation for everything I had been blessed with; it was a humbling realization that my success—what I ultimately achieve in life—is limited only by my capacity to believe in myself.

I find myself thinking about my future with the same spirit I felt that night I took Melissa out on the dance floor—one that is eager and excited at the journey before me. I am not the same pale-faced boy who stood at the end of the line, knees shaking in anxious fear at what might be coming. The moments I shared with Melissa that night helped shatter my debilitating insecurity, and I have since found that my belief in myself is rivaled only by my passion for realizing my potential.

**Entrance Essay – Mentor Text #2**

***Makes notes on the essay to show your understanding of the writer’s moves: organization, word choice, sentence structure, voice, literary devices…***

I was a shy thirteen-year-old who had already lived in six locations and attended five schools. Having recently moved, I was relieved when I finally began to develop a new group of friends. However, the days following September 11, 2001, were marked with change. People began to stare at me. Many conversations came to a nervous stop when I walked by. However, it wasn’t until one of my peers asked if I was a terrorist that it really hit me. Osama, my name is Osama. I went from having a unique name that served as a conversation starter to having the same name as the most wanted man in America. The stares and the comments were just the beginning. Eventually I received a death threat at school. I remember crying alone in my room, afraid to tell my parents in fear that they might not let me go to school anymore.

My experience opened my eyes up to racial and religious dynamics in the United States. I started to see how these dynamics drove people’s actions, even if some were not aware of the reasons. The more I looked at my surroundings with a critical eye, the more I realized that my classmates had not threatened me because of hate, but because of fear and ignorance. This realization was extremely empowering. I knew that mirroring their hostility would only reinforce the fear and prejudice they held. Instead, I reached out to my peers with an open mind and respect. My acceptance of others served as a powerful counter example to many negative stereotypes I had to face. With this approach, I was often able to transform fear into acceptance, and acceptance into appreciation. I chose not to hide my heritage or myself, despite the fear of judgment or violence. As a result, I developed a new sense of self-reliance and self-confidence.

The years following September 11th were a true test of character for me. I learned how to feel comfortable in uncomfortable situations. This allowed me to become a dynamic and outgoing individual. This newfound confidence fueled a passion to become a leader and help uplift multiple minority communities. During the last two summers I made this passion a reality when I took the opportunity to work with underprivileged minority students. All of the students I worked with came from difficult backgrounds and many didn’t feel as though college was an option for them. I learned these students’ goals and aspirations, as well as their obstacles and hardships. I believed in them, and I constantly told them that they would make it. I worked relentlessly to make sure my actions matched my words of encouragement. I went well above the expectations of my job and took the initiative to plan several additional workshops on topics such as public speaking, time management, and confidence building. My extra efforts helped give these students the tools they needed to succeed. I feel great pride in having helped these students achieve this important goal. I know that they will be able to use these tools to continue to succeed.

My experiences leading minority groups taught me that I need to stand out to lead others and myself to success. I need to be proud of my culture and myself. My experiences after September 11th have taught me to defeat the difficulties in life instead of allowing them to defeat me.

**Entrance Essay – Mentor Text #3**

I had never broken into a car before.

We were in Laredo, having just finished our first day at a Habitat for Humanity work site. The Hotchkiss volunteers had already left, off to enjoy some Texas BBQ, leaving me behind with the college kids to clean up. Not until we were stranded did we realize we were locked out of the van.

Someone picked a coat hanger out of the dumpster, handed it to me, and took a few steps back.

“Can you do that thing with a coat hanger to unlock it?”

“Why me?” I thought.

More out of amusement than optimism, I gave it a try. I slid the hanger into the window’s seal like I’d seen on crime shows, and spent a few minutes jiggling the apparatus around the inside of the frame. Suddenly, two things simultaneously clicked. One was the lock on the door. (I actually succeeded in springing it.) The other was the realization that I’d been in this type of situation before. In fact, I’d been born into this type of situation.

My upbringing has numbed me to unpredictability and chaos. With a family of seven, my home was loud, messy, and spottily supervised. My siblings arguing, the dog barking, the phone ringing—all meant my house was functioning normally. My Dad, a retired Navy pilot, was away half the time. When he was home, he had a parenting style something like a drill sergeant. At the age of nine, I learned how to clear burning oil from the surface of water. My Dad considered this a critical life skill—you know, in case my aircraft carrier should ever get torpedoed. “The water’s on fire! Clear a hole!” he shouted, tossing me in the lake without warning. While I’m still unconvinced about that particular lesson’s practicality, my Dad’s overarching message is unequivocally true: much of life is unexpected, and you have to deal with the twists and turns.

Living in my family, days rarely unfolded as planned. A bit overlooked, a little pushed around, I learned to roll with reality, negotiate a quick deal, and give the improbable a try. I don’t sweat the small stuff, and I definitely don’t expect perfect fairness. So what if our dining room table only has six chairs for seven people? Someone learns the importance of punctuality every night.

But more than punctuality and a special affinity for musical chairs, my family life has taught me to thrive in situations over which I have no power. Growing up, I never controlled my older siblings, but I learned how to thwart their attempts to control me. I forged alliances, and realigned them as necessary. Sometimes, I was the poor, defenseless little brother; sometimes I was the omniscient elder. Different things to different people, as the situation demanded. I learned to adapt.

Back then, these techniques were merely reactions undertaken to ensure my survival. But one day this fall, Dr. Hicks, our Head of School, asked me a question that he hoped all seniors would reflect on throughout the year: “How can I participate in a thing I do not govern, in the company of people I did not choose?”

The question caught me off guard, much like the question posed to me in Laredo. Then, I realized I knew the answer. I knew why the coat hanger had been handed to me.

Growing up as the middle child in my family, I was a vital participant in a thing I did not govern, in the company of people I did not choose. It’s family. It’s society. And often, it’s chaos. You participate by letting go of the small stuff, not expecting order and perfection, and facing the unexpected with confidence, optimism, and preparedness. My family experience taught me to face a serendipitous world with confidence.