**Essay 1: Sibling Success**

I vividly recall asking my mother why her waistline was steadily expanding. She took my hand, placed it on her stomach, and said, “Meet your baby sister!” I was six years old and family life had always been focused on me and my needs. Suddenly, I felt uncertain about my future. How would my life change? Would my new sister and I like each other? My father assured me that I would be a kind, loving brother, but I was not so sure!

Hours after Lauren’s birth, on a snowy February day, my dad took me to the hospital to meet her. I insisted on wearing my souvenir Burger King crown because I liked it, and thought that she’d like it, too! Amid all the fanfare and excitement, somehow there was a special gift from Lauren to me: a shiny red fire truck! As I opened my gift, I wondered how she could have known that trucks were among my favorite toys (although I didn’t ponder that too long).

Daily life quickly changed for me in ways I hadn’t imagined. Initially, my big-brother role was mostly that of helpful assistant, who dutifully gave her a bottle or held her. After I had been assisting with her physical care for some time, I volunteered more meaningful contributions, such as encouraging her to crawl and walk. To my surprise, I secretly started to enjoy my new role. I was getting unexpected pleasure from my increasing responsibilities and from my rising family status. No longer was I simply the older brother; now I was also her close friend, teacher, and coach. Her respect for me made (and makes) me feel more mature, capable, adult-like. I treat her questions seriously and trust that she finds the lessons I teach her from my experience helpful and relevant. I welcome the opportunity to mentor her and she shows me her appreciation.

Lauren has definitely benefited from my help, and I can see that our relationship is more mutually beneficial than I had anticipated. The lessons that I have taught Lauren have shown me the benefits of compassion, patience, communication, and understanding the so-called feminine “mystique.” When she broke her collarbone, I helped her with daily duties, such as getting dressed and carrying her books. I was pleased to be able to help her during this difficult and awkward time. I’m also patient with her when we’re active in shared interests like music, swimming, or tennis.

As Lauren matures into more of a peer, I value her feminine point of view. Despite our age and gender differences, my parents enabled a lifelong bond between us, and I foster that bond as we grow. I appreciate Lauren’s opinions about things. She feels sufficiently comfortable to comment on my friends (“they dress funny”), my clothes (“too preppy”), and my haircut (“grow it out; it’s too short!”). We laugh and sometimes get angry with each other, but we always resolve our differences, which serves to strengthen relationship.

Thinking back to the year she was born, I realize that my dad’s prediction was accurate. I have become the wise older brother, with a greater appreciation for the dimension and richness that a positive sibling relationship can bring. Our mutual support, trust, and love have brought out the best in me, and I know that the best is yet to come.

Strengths?

Weaknesses?

**Essay 2**

There is a certain delight in feeling little. I mean little in the context of the word belittle. As negative a connotation the word has adopted, in a different frame of reference, it’s quite enthralling. An example:

I have an unconscious tendency to strategize my position in a classroom. I prefer the front-row-middle seat always.

An early Saturday morning earlier this month found me standing under the doorframe of my assigned classroom, staring at the redheaded girl who had stolen my seat. I spent 54 seconds telepathically explaining to her and her Starbucks coffee that THAT was MY seat. All I got back was static. Giving up grudgingly, I wandered to what seemed to be the absolutely most irritating seat in the entire room—middle-row middle seat. Amazingly, the tallest students of the class found it absolutely necessary to sit in the front two rows, creating a grade-A wall between any view of the front and me. Quite an advantage if the teacher threw erasers, though, but an unlikely possibility in this class—Quantum Theory and Relativity.

My teacher stepped in. Quick punctuated biography of Hayn Park: Born South Korean. Raised South American. Schooled Harvard, Moscow, Columbia. Specialty: quantum physics. Korean military service. Columbia again. His opening bit of wisdom to my class: “Stay in school, at least they don’t make you dig ditches.” He had me at Panama.

He opened class with the insanely attractive “Common sense doesn’t apply here.” His follow-ups were even more alluring. “Next class we won’t be working in three-dimensional space anymore, we’ll start with 3+1 space” and “If something travels faster than light, then your cause will happen after you effect” and my ultimate favorite, “Here’s how to make a black hole.”

It’s been six classes, and I now know what it means to have one’s breath taken away, to literally have the air stolen from my lungs by some magnificent invisible force. For two-and-a-half hours every seven days, I enter a world where boredom has no time to invade, where math is the only language, and theory the only absolute. One class a week to grasp knowledge I did not know existed, to learn that what I thought was impossible could be.

The seat I was forced to take that first day has ever since been my greatest blessing. From all four corners I am constantly saturated by brilliance. Angular people lopsidedly focused on a particular subject, speaking with fluency in that one subject. Vulcan at his forge. A distinctive pride arises when I realize I can call these my peers. A distinctive pride with an attached humility. Feeling small is a boon when I see all the room I have to grow.

During breaks, I listen to Hayn’s off-topic trivia about anti-matter and the like. The impact of his abridged soda-machine-time lectures is staggering. Instead of unproductively staring at walls on my subway ride home, I reread the notes of the day, redrawing some diagrams, reliving the class. In doing so, not only do I see the facts but I also comprehend their truth. Thinking is a gerund often spoken of but rarely done. Thought is the effect of my Saturday morning venture. Thought—the actual stimulation of new ideas and questions based on logic. Startling myself with what I know what I can know, and what I want to know.

I crave this in college and in life.

Strengths?

Weaknesses?

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**Essay 3: Dreem Denied**

“If I cooked you, I’d be able to survive on your meat for over a month.” This was not the welcome I had expected on my first day at the British School in Phuket, Thailand. I wondered if my fellow students here would be as kind as they were in America or would they be rude and brash, as this insult implied? Would the curriculum be an academic challenge or an intellectual breeze? I had no idea what to expect.

At ten years old, I was 4’11” and weighed 185 pounds. As Dreem (this was his name) spoke his offensive words, he smirked. Almost instinctively, something snapped inside me and, although aggressiveness is not one of my traits, I rushed him and knocked him to the floor. I think he got my point.

Dreem did not look like other Thai kids. While he appeared to be Caucasian, his insult implied that English was not his first language. However, with his lightly colored skin and golden blonde curls, he certainly didn’t look Thai. As October arrived, Dreem’s various traits began to intrigue me and I wanted to know more about him. Whether he was eating by himself in the boisterous refectory or sitting in the corner of the library silently doing work, he was always alone. I assumed he didn’t have many friends because of his personality, but I decided to give him a second chance.

One particularly humid day, I approached him, choosing to ignore the possibility of harassment. He was sitting under a sala (a type of Thai hut), fiddling with a cell phone, when I interrupted him. That first chat was brief, but it planted the seeds for our budding friendship. We then sat next to each other in classes, ate lunch together in the refectory, and did homework together. We had become good friends. From bowling to jet skiing, we did it all together and were inseparable, quite a turnaround from that first assault on my weight.

After a year in Thailand, my family moved back to the U.S. I kept in touch with Dreem by weekly emails and occasionally caught him online with MSN Messenger. Dreem lived on Patong Beach, one of the hardest hit areas of the tragic 2004 tsunami. He didn’t survive. His house was flattened. I was crushed. I had never lost somebody that close to me.

Dreem’s death dramatically changed my life. I began thinking that life was too short and it would be a waste to do things I didn’t really want to do. Before Dreem, I never really devoted myself to working hard, but since his passing I now focus on what’s important and I hate leaving work unfinished. I want to be successful, not only for myself but also for Dreem. After I reflected on what happened to him, I realized that he never had the chance to do what he wanted in his life—to live and just “be.”

His memory burns within me and fuels my passion for life. My once short, stout frame has now grown to six feet tall and my then 185 pounds are now 170. I often wonder what Dreem would be like today. Where would he be? What would he look like? What would he be doing? I’ll never know these answers, but I’ll also never forget my friend

whose name defines my approach to life.

Strengths?

Weaknesses?

**Essay 4**

Believe it or not, the old phrase, “A woman’s place is in the home” is still alive and well in the scientific community, as the dramatic gender-bias study published last September in the Proceedings of the National Academy of the Sciences shows. Today, it’s “A woman’s place is not in the lab.” The path I have taken over the past four years has proven to me that women can be just as comfortable in STEM careers as they were 75 years ago as housewives. My place – where I feel most content – is definitely in the lab.

I work as a research assistant in the Department of Neurosurgery’s lab at Penn State’s Hershey Medical Center. I obtained this coveted position as a high school student, only through dogged persistence. Neurosurgery is one of the most competitive fields of medicine and proving to a team of world-class researchers that I could contribute to their complex, meaningful studies was no minor feat. I spent my first summer absorbing information and directly applying it to my diverse list of assigned tasks, aiming for mastery and efficiency. Since then, I have devoted the bulk of my life to research. Over the past two summers, I have spent roughly 50 hours a week in the lab. During the school year, I try to squeeze in as much lab time as I can. Ten hours a week is about all I can manage, but I appreciate the quality of the time I can spend working with my colleagues. Scarfing down snacks during the 30-minute commute has become a ritual I fondly associate with my anticipation of learning and productivity there.

My work focuses on animal research, immunohistochemistry, and biochemical studies involving amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS). ALS is a disease for which there is no current effective treatment or cure. Research is critical in offering alternatives for patients who have few options for a high quality of life. My mentor, Dr. Amanda Snyder, has taught me far more than lab technique and critical analysis skills. She has instilled in me the importance of being tenacious, inventive, and passionate about researching such a debilitating disease. Dr. Snyder also demonstrates the importance of comparative studies. As a scientist, she is committed to meaningful, humane animal research. Through her example, I have become an active proponent of responsible animal studies, a topic I advocated in a TEDx Youth talk I presented during my junior year. In addition to providing a platform for activism, my lab position has also enabled me to shadow leading ALS specialists, who have further inspired me to follow in their path. Most importantly, though, my lab work allows me to meet ALS patients who might someday benefit from our clinical trials. These patients are the reason I dedicate my summers and free time to seemingly tedious duties and constant commuting.

Receiving my monogrammed white lab coat was a rite of passage for me. It represented the confirmation that I’ve entered a world where I can scrupulously investigate the delicate intricacies of the brain and nervous system. It’s a world where I witness firsthand the transformation of raw ideas, that were once a mere hybrid of curiosity and prior knowledge, into pending solutions for the tribulations that plague humanity. Eight researchers in my lab are female. These intelligent, passionate women are beacons of achievement in their respective fields. Their example both challenges and humbles me. They invest in my scientific future through every moment they spend with me. I hope that someday I’m able to repay that investment by further proving the point that women belong in laboratories and scientific institutions, where they can excel. I would like to banish, once and for all, the misguided mindsets about where a woman’s “place” should be. In the meantime, I’ll be in the lab.

Strengths?

Weaknesses?