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ENG4U

Period 2



Personal Essay Portfolio



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Personal Essay 1

Write a short, detailed narrative about something you experienced or observed in school.

Date Completed: 25th August 2017

Personal Essay 2

Write a narrative designed to show a place you know. Do not describe the place. Depict the place by showing what happens in it. Your place may be a room, a town, a store, someone's living room, anywhere. This place can be frightening, inspirational, comforting, etc. Be sure to reflect the mood of this place through the 5 senses.

Date Completed: 25th September 2017

Personal Essay 3

Write an evaluation of some event or of some person such as a teacher in a position of responsibility. Do not tell your reader what to think. Guide your reader's response through your selection of details.

Date Completed: 13th October 2017

Lesson of a Lifetime

Her words flew across the room. His anger echoed. But only *I* knew that those words were full of lies. Or so I thought. I will never forget that dreadful day, and I only wished I had never witnessed it. But sadly, I did. We were friends, he was about two years older. But emotions ruled, and he got jealous of the fact that I was the youngest kid in the whole grade. So he pushed me aside, took me off all his social media platforms and sent me the most obscene text message in the world. Before that, I was literally a lamp post to him. He always asked me to join group chats with him and his then-girlfriend. Being the “popular kid” in school, everyone “loved” him and sucked up to him. So I knew that the next few months would be hell for me. Little did I know, my best friend would leave for another school shortly, and my social life would almost become a disaster permanently.

Groupwork was of utmost importance to our grades, and it didn’t help that no one wanted me in their groups anymore. Social anxiety began to start taking its toll on me and I started being afraid to mix around with people, thanks to their shunning. To make matters worse, he started getting close to a teacher. It wasn’t like a mother-son bond, or brother-sister bond. It was way too friendly to be. He was a smart kid, but he was definitely overperforming in that particular teacher’s subject. The increase in grades definitely wasn’t gradual, it was an overnight increase. Eventually, he won her heart and convinced her that I was up to no good, that I was the one who tried to destroy his life. My grades plummeted and reached an all time low, simply because I couldn’t pay attention.

One day, I sat down for lunch, all alone. All of a sudden, these group of kids who I’ve somehow never noticed before sat down in front of me. They claimed to be in many of my classes. They were people who I’d never talked to in my lifetime. I realised that these were your stereotypical “nerds” and “hipsters” who no one would talk to. Some of them were also the “cool girls”, who boys would avoid. They would continue to sit with me in classes and be there for me when I needed them. But the teacher was still my teacher, and he was still her really close friend with plenty of *benefits*. For months, we’d seen him stay back for “extra help”. We all found it strange that they didn’t need anything but just the two of them to revise, and the fact that they locked the doors and drew the blinds made it even more suspicious. My newfound friends and I started to become sleuths in this matter, but he soon threatened us and cautioned us that we would be in deep trouble if we tried to dig up more. Eventually, even the “nerds” and “hipsters” and “cool girls” started to listen to his ideas and instructions that instructed people to stay away as far as possible from me.

During that dreaded school expedition in China, my worst nightmare came true. Expeditions were compulsory and they were part of the school curriculum and there were assessments on the trip, and the only good reason you could give to excuse yourself was that your passport had expired. This time round, this particular teacher was the trip leader. Throughout the trip, he stuck to her like he was a fly and she was a fly trap. And that night, that was my breaking point. He literally ripped up 2 weeks of hard work that I'd been working on for a group presentation for a cultural exchange session with another school. I was selected to be the main speaker initially, and he ended up placing me as a backup, by convincing the teacher that I was up to no good. That very night, he snatched my artistically crafted speech and ripped it into pieces. The platform where I'd stored my speech being inaccessible, he told her that I'd forgotten to bring it and she instantly gave him my position.

That very night, I witnessed the unimaginable. I was made to stay behind and explain to my group teacher what had happened. To my surprise, my group teacher had already started to suspect something was going on and she said she'd received reports from his girlfriend. Suddenly, we witnessed them strolling past the hall, walking towards the elevators. As soon as they were out of sight, I silently crept towards the elevators and observed which floor they stopped on. I took the elevator up to their floor, and there, I witnessed what I wasn't supposed to see. Nothing indecent, but I was pretty sure that holding hands was a trait mainly meant for couples. Then, they walked towards her room and slammed the room door behind them. A week after we got back to school, I was called in for questioning about the indecent incident. That afternoon, as I tried to get into the chemistry lab, she locked the door and refused to let me in. Fifteen minutes later, she pulled me in because she didn't want the teachers passing by to notice her actions, and the moment I sat down, she interrupted her own lesson to give a speech. Her loud words flew across the room, and his anger echoed. I witnessed the angry expression on his face as she started blasting all kinds of words, targeting me and those who she thought were involved in exposing her deeds. After class, many people started admitting that they knew about everything, but they refused to testify in fear of being labelled as "lame" by the "popular kid", or failing the subject she taught. The following year would be a new year with new teachers, and I thought I'd seen the last of her, but, no, we'd been to an event for our school's community service requirement, and there she was, being his team's legal supervisor at the event. As expected, she tried to get me into trouble. But somehow, everything calmed down as we approached our final exams and we somehow ended on a good note.

Still, I have no regrets that all of that happened. For if none of that happened, I wouldn't be where I am today. I'd never understand what real social anxiety felt like, and I wouldn't be the empathetic and caring person I am today. I would be stuck with a bunch of people who were

pretentious hooligans who would go to desperate measures to gain popularity, and I'd never know who my real and true friends are.

The Wondrous Battlefield

It was a fresh start and the bell rang for the first time. There I was, standing, feeling all alone because I was clueless on where to go. I walked up to a group of people, who I assumed were about my age and I asked, "Are you people in Grade 8 too?" "Yes", this tall and fairly mature guy replied, and he continued babbling on with some handful of slang that I didn't quite get. No sooner did I realize that this guy thought that I was his old friend, who'd left the school a year ago. I thought I'd never talk to this guy again, but he ended up in my college English Class. It was second period and we started out with basic science. Our very first in class assignment was groupwork, and a lot of the people in that class had known each other for about a year by now. I was a stranger to this foreign land, it was the unknown to me. This guy called out to me, and said, "You're Rain? That's a great name. Wanna sit with us?". Coincidentally, all my other classes were with him as well.

Four years, that's the time I had there, and I knew I had to make friends to survive in that wild playing field. But I never had a social life before. I was too focused on what I studied and homework that I never had time to even watch a movie. In fact, I'd never stepped into a cinema, and neither did I know how to buy a movie ticket. In return, no one would hang out with me because they assumed all I wanted to do was work non stop. But now that we had to do countless projects that involved collaboration, I knew the only way to work together effectively would be when true bonds were formed. I was reluctant to even make any small talk with anyone. But I soon hit it off with the guy who asked me to sit next to him, and our friendship grew until we became best friends. We always made sure the groups had us in it, until he abruptly moved to another school, telling me only the night before school started. But we eventually united in college, with hopes to get into the same world-class universities.

In this wild battlefield, life without support was almost unbearable. I realized that my best friend was the only one I was close to, and many of my other friends were only there because he was there, and he was very likeable. It so happened that this year, the guy who I asked if we were in the same grade on the first day now had some classes with me, and I just randomly approached him and sat down with him. From there, he helped me create true bonds with more people, and he taught me a valuable lesson, to never be afraid of trying new things. I'd always stuck to my best friend, the same person over and over again. This was the place where I'd learned that you have to make mistakes to learn things. This is where I learned that popularity didn't actually matter. The simplest things like striking up a conversation with strangers and saying "Hi" to acquaintances were still foreign ideas to me, but here, I learned much more than just how to talk to strangers.

Trips, those were the dreaded moments that I had there. We were scrambled and for days, we would be with mortal enemies or strangers, making the place even more foreign. Who we bunked with would be even worse, we couldn't choose, and we would always be given one who we weren't close to. My best times were when I stood on stage, proudly projecting my precious voice. I stood many times on stage to sing tuneful melodies and even once, to act. These moments helped me relax from the harsh realities of the battlefield. It was the last day of the battle. We were celebrating like nobody's business and we knew we'd made it through. The bell rang, and I knew it would be the last time I ever heard it. This was where almost all my friendships were made and broken, and where I learned countless valuable lessons. As we all, as an entire grade, gathered in a circle, we put our hands over each other's and said "Friends once, friends forever, forever and always."

Murphy's Law

I woke up early in the morning, looking at my phone. "Oh, I'm going to be late", I thought. I'd thought that it was going to be like how it was always before, an early morning flight would be booked because rates were cheaper. But then, I looked at the flight itinerary and realised the small, but now rather significant "p.m." by the "04:30". That could've been a bad start to our last school trip if I didn't notice the "p.m.". I'd be waiting, probably alone, in the airport for 12 hours if it wasn't for my sudden state of awareness. I packed the night before and I was looking forward so much to this trip to Beijing, but at the same time I felt quite down about the fact that this would be my last overseas school trip with my friends and classmates. What a shame it would be, if anything were to go horribly wrong. I thought, "Nothing else could go wrong." Oh, but soon, I'd know how wrong my thoughts were.

I slept for a little while more. By a little, I mean another 6 more hours, and woke up around 11 o'clock in the morning. I had a very late and long breakfast, or rather brunch and I started scrolling through my messages. The very first message that I saw gave me a fright. It was one of our teachers, in the grade's groupchat. "You all need to be at the airport by 1:30 p.m. since we need to check in two hours earlier and do multiple headcounts." I looked at the clock. It was already 30 minutes past noon and I nudged my dad, "We need to leave the house soon, there'll be traffic. I need to be at the airport in an hour." We zoomed past countless cars on the highway like we were a Formula 1 racecar trying to win a gold.

Reaching the Second Kuala Lumpur International Airport exactly at 30 minutes past 1, I quickly dragged my luggage and backpack to the assembly point and joined my friends. Never in my life was I so worried. In the midst of all that hurry, I was certain I'd forgotten something. Was it my passport? No. It was in my hand. The visa would be stuck inside, and our teachers had our flight tickets. Oh, crap! My wallet. I realised I forgot my wallet and whipped out my phone, frantically calling my dad. But suddenly, there was a tap on my back. It was my dad, with my wallet in his hand. "You forgot this!", he said. "Thanks, dad.", I replied.

I thought that things would be smooth after that heart stopping moment, but I was wrong again. So wrong. My intuition told me, "Don't say too soon", but my brain told me, "Enjoy and live in the moment". So I followed my brain. After all, the brain is the thought central of an individual, with the most knowledge, while intuition is just a premonitory sense. Well, this time, my knowledge wasn't doing me any good. I'd forgotten about Murphy's Law. "If anything can go wrong, it has a chance to go wrong." Or somewhere along those lines.

The next morning, we arrived at the Beijing Capital Airport at 1 a.m. in the morning. We were all confused and tired, and we couldn't wait to head to the college we were staying at for that trip. As we stepped out of the terminal, all I felt around me was cold and dry air. My hands seemed like they were non-existent and my eyes felt like they had to be sealed shut with a tank of water. Wearing only a pair of jeans and a shirt, I hugged on to my friend to feel his warmth. "Great, I forgot to bring a winter jacket.", I realised. As we got on the bus, I was the first in line. Forgetting that in China, the driver would be on the left, I led the whole group of us to the left side. I tried to open the door, and it was at that moment I embarrassingly realised that I'd made the wrong move.

Once again, I thought everything was going to be fine, but I ended up rooming with someone I wasn't close to, and I didn't have much sleep either. I tried to get into Facebook, with success. Finally, I had a form of entertainment. A horrified look dawned upon me when I realised that I was using my limited prepaid roaming plan. I had the worst breakfast ever the next day, and being a vegetarian, I gasped when I realised I was eating a chicken bun for breakfast. Although my Mandarin wasn't of a proficient level, it was definitely sufficient to read the word "chicken". I guess I was simply too tired from the flight.

I assumed nothing else could go wrong, but by the last hour of that 6 day trip, after visiting the Forbidden City, Great Wall of China and Summer Palace and various other historical attractions, I realised one thing: Don't say anything too soon. If you say "nothing can possibly go wrong", everything that can go wrong will always go wrong. From almost injuring myself in the Forbidden City by tripping over a floor beam to almost dropping my phone off the Great Wall and almost tripping into the Summer Palace's lake, this whole trip was not just memorable, but it taught me two very important lessons: Murphy's Law always applies, so you should never say anything too soon; and Newton's Laws in Physics, the one that says "a still object will only move when there is motion", can sometimes be defied.

ENG4U CCT Reflection

From my process of writing these three essays, I've learnt that writing should come from the heart *and* brain. The grammatical part of the essay should originate from the brain, while the content of the piece of writing should be from the heart. Irregardless of whether it is fictional or nonfictional, writing from the heart is important as it can show our true emotions or opinions, whereas our brains are biased. By showing true emotions, the reader's own emotions will be evoked and the whole point of a narrative is to show, but not tell. I have always been told by friends and family that I should send my stories and essays in for publication because "they're perfect", but I always tell myself that there's always room for improvement, and nobody's completely perfect.

I think of myself as someone who gets inspired by what I read, hear and what I experience in my life. Almost all of my pieces have either happened in real life or are based on real life experiences. I feel that I am most inspired by books that I classify under the "adventure" genre. At a young age, I was inspired by the way the late British author Enid Blyton crafted each and every one of her fairy tales with literary devices that most children wouldn't understand. During highschool, I had to read books like "Through the Looking Glass", "Romeo & Juliet", "The Hunger Games", "Much Ado About Nothing" and "The Great Gatsby". These books, although classified under various genres, all involved long winded adventures, and were also eventually all turned into films, hence it made them more realistic and relatable to real life. Therefore, I classify them under the adventure genre. Almost all of my nonfiction writing also involve adventures.

As a writer, I find myself often using flowery language, as I have a strong belief that it can keep the reader hooked to the piece of writing. Despite being discouraged by numerous English Teachers to tone down the flowery language, I took risks for each and every in class assessment and take home assignment, all the way until finals, and I never once was penalized by the examiner for using flowery language. Taking risks isn't a flaw or weakness, but I rather see that as a strength. However, I know my weaknesses. I often find myself going off topic or off the general question as well. I occasionally do this on purpose, hoping that the reader would be more entertained, but I still view it as a weakness. I also find myself using clichés too often and there are quite a lot of metaphorical questions found in my writing, which I strongly take to be a weakness as it will make the reader feel as if they're answering a quiz.

My first personal essay was an adventure of me going through a living hell in my life, my second one was an adventure of me going through middle school and high school, and the final one was also about my final high school expedition. I selected my personal essays topics to be all about my school life, simply because those were the best years of my life to this day. They were days where I could laugh and cry in the very same sixty seconds and the days where most of my friendships were created and broken. I never want to forget them, and I never will, because my experiences there taught me countless life lessons. I hope that next semester's students will get an equal opportunity, just like us, with an array of choices of topics to write, and that they will be able to freely express their ideas and creativity in their writing. An interesting topic that they could do would be their life in high school, expressed through showing and not telling.