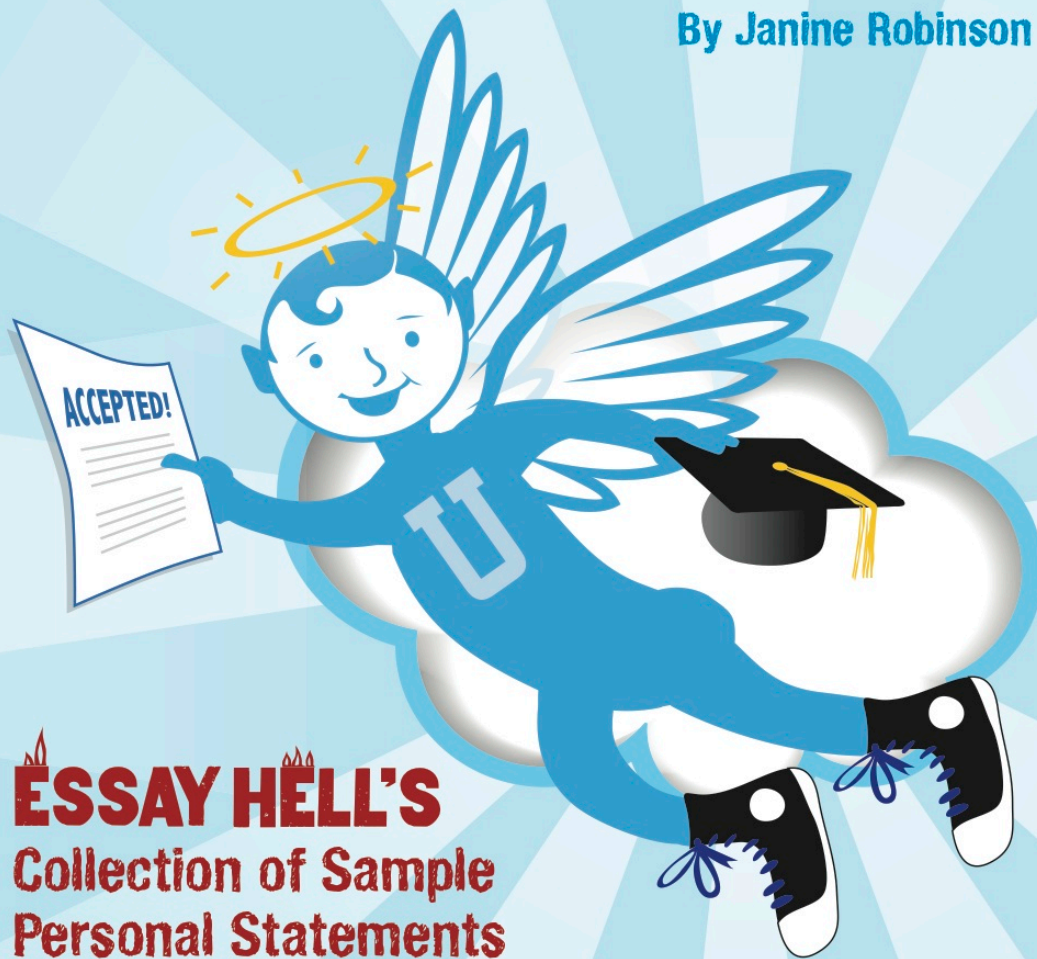


HEAVENLY ESSAYS

50 Narrative College Application Essays That Worked

By Janine Robinson



ESSAY HELL'S
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right and where they got in!

Six Sample College Application Essays

Excerpted From

Heavenly Essays

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Laguna Beach, CA
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Hang Ups

Dangling about 30 feet above the ground, I looked down on the entire neighborhood park with its rolling hills, vibrant green grass, and multiple tall eucalyptus trees. Buckled tightly in my brand new Diamond Mountain climbing harness, I admired my handiwork.

My old blue-and-black braided climbing rope thrown over a branch held me aloft, while a slipknot I tied while hoisting myself up prevented my descent. After a few minutes, I decided to return to the ground, but realized my knot grew too tight for me to untie. I was stuck.

Ever since my dad taught me the Bowline in second grade, the intricacy of knots has fascinated me. I spent hours mastering the craft, reading every knot book and website I could get my hands on. All my knots usually came in handy. In 8th grade, I won a competition in the Boy Scouts with a square knot, beating the instructor who taught an alternative knot that took longer to tie. A couple years later, I rescued my brother's pickup out of the mud with the unbreakable loop of the Bow Line during one of our off-road adventures. I even returned a stranded rock climber's lifeline by tying a Sheep's Bend between a small piece of paracord and his climbing rope.

Ironically, on the day I got stuck in the tree, I spent all morning trying to finally conquer the biggest and baddest knot of them all: the Monkey's Fist. After at least 50 failed attempts at the step-by-step process, my trusty blue rope finally bore the complex, dense sphere of rope. With a heavy Monkey's Fist on the end of my rope, I could throw an end over any branch.

After hoisting myself into the treetops that day I dangled for several hours due to that hastily tied Slip Knot. When my dad finally returned from work and saw me,

he lugged over an extension ladder, and laughed as he untied me from the tangle he inspired years earlier.

When I reflected on this adventure, I realized another irony in the situation: It took a complex knot like the Monkey's First to elevate me into the tree, but a simple Slip Knot stopped me from getting back down. Comparing these knots, I learned that the effort and persistence I invest in a challenge like tying a knot translates into a certain lasting power.

A Slip Knot is extremely easy to tie, but disappears with a quick pull on the rope. However, a Monkey's Fist takes hours to learn and minutes to tie, but is impossible to untie. In so many other parts of my life I have experienced this similar relationship: that the more I try, the more useful and permanent the reward.

I expect that my knot-tying adventures, and the related lessons, even the most embarrassing ones, will help me through any future hang ups I encounter from here on out.

Alex Segall
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Better to be Kind

Every day after school, the first thing I would do was climb the stairs to my dad's bedroom and sit on his bed. He would reach out to me and hold my hand while I told him about my day: if I got a good grade on a paper; if a teacher liked one of my comments in class; or if I did two pirouettes instead of one.

He would smile and tell me how proud he was. Nothing made me happier—except the hope that I was also making him happy.

The reason my dad was there for me almost every day of my life was that he was diagnosed with cancer and homebound since I was an infant. I learned about life from leaning on him and from him leaning on me—especially when my mom abandoned us because she couldn't handle his illness.

I went to him for all of my needs. If I had a problem with a friendship or a relationship, if I was scared of the dark, and especially if I procrastinated on a paper, he would stay up late to help me no matter how sick he felt. In a way, he was my life coach, personal therapist, best friend, and dad all in one.

But at the same time, he leaned on me. By the time I was 10, he could no longer eat. My mom stopped cooking. From then on, we no longer gathered around the dinner table. Not only did I have to learn to cook for myself, but to feed my dad through his feeding tube as well. Then during my freshman year when my mom left us, I took over her responsibilities. I did the laundry, cooking, cleaning, and was my dad's personal nurse.

Last year, after I turned 16, he had to go on oxygen 24 hours a day and was bedridden. I learned to pay bills, shop for a month's worth of groceries without spending more than a hundred dollars, and drove him to his doctor's and physical therapy appointments. I could not have friends sleep over, stay out late, or bake cinnamon pancakes because the smell bothered him. When we had to put our house on the market, I raced home every day and frantically cleaned it for showings.

I never talked to my dad about my own struggles or fears because I did not want to worry him. We were both trying to make each other feel better. My goal each day was to make him smile and relieve his suffering any way possible.

But when he left this earth, I felt like my purpose was gone. I was lost. There was no one at home, no one to stay up late and help me with my schoolwork, no one to help me decide what were the right colleges to apply to or what field or major I should consider. Even though my dad leaned on me for everything, I didn't realize how much I leaned on him until he was gone.

Going back to school after he died was the hardest thing, but his passion for education motivated me to resume my classes and get the best grades I could despite my sadness. My dad put me first, and I put him first. Now I am learning how to put myself first.

I now have a life coach, practice meditation, keep a daily journal, and have guardians who love and guide me. In meditation, I am learning to have empathy and compassion for my mom, but at the same time respect my own needs first.

I still think about my dad all the time, and hear his voice encouraging me with his favorite saying: "It is better to be kind than right." I think my dad would be more proud not only that I am pursuing my college dreams, but that I am learning to take care of myself like he always took care of me.

Brooks Johnson
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Call Me Crazy

After two hours of intense racing on the open water, we thought our day was done. Instead, our coach ordered us to race another five miles home, rowing as hard as when we came. Stuck in the middle of the harbor with seven other teammates in the crew boat, there was nowhere to hide.

“Give me a reason to call 911,” coach yelled. Drained and exhausted, I could feel my eyes starting to close. Tunnel vision set in. For a few moments, I blacked out.

I had been here before. This was the point where I had to push my body to do the opposite of what my brain wanted me to do: Go even harder. I focused on the coxswain yelling at me, and hoped my adrenaline wouldn't wear off.

When I first joined the team as a freshman, I only knew a little about this sport. My older brother warned me about the ridiculous hours and tough workouts. The one thing no one told me, though, is that to row crew you had to be a little crazy. It's not the mentally insane type of crazy, but the type where you force yourself to disregard all logic and reason and push yourself to keep going.

After four years of rowing crew, I realized that this was exactly what I loved. This zone that I get into allowed me to break down new mental and physical boundaries every day. It gave me the satisfaction of knowing I went harder than any other previous day.

I never even knew I had this type of mindset until I started crew. Not only did this bring out my new mindset, but it grew each day. Every day I looked forward to pushing myself to my limits—and then climbing down deeper into that well to exceed my prior limits.

When I first started crew, my coach encouraged me to go into what he called our “dark place.” This “dark place” was where my mind retreated when I was in extreme pain while rowing. Knowing that it was only my mind holding me back from going any harder, I learned to reverse my thinking so I almost craved the pain to make myself go faster.

It wasn't until recently that I realized how much crew shaped my life and how I've changed over the course of it. My intensity, drive, but mainly the nature of my competitiveness has been somehow honed, sharpened and brought to light for me.

Now, when I'm supposed to stop, or feel something is trying to hold me back, all I want to do is push harder to break through it. Now, if I didn't do well on a test, I challenged myself to do better on my next one by doing whatever it took to prepare, and then some extra on top of that. I've also started using the idea from crew where the top guys push the bottom guys to spur a competitive collaborative environment in my classes and with friends.

While I'm conscious of this internal competitiveness almost all of the time, I don't feel crazy. I feel motivated and empowered. Even when we raced back on fumes after that grueling workout in the harbor, I couldn't believe how invigorated and strong I felt once back on land. As we brought in the boats, my teammates and I re-capped the painful details, laughing at the same time. None of us could wait for the next day to break another barrier. Call us crazy. We like it that way.

Duncan Lynd
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California State University, Long Beach, CA

A Small World

While grabbing lunch between games at a water polo tournament, I noticed one of my new teammates rarely looked me in the eye. Instead of taking the empty seat next to me, he opted to sit across the table. Even when I tried to start a conversation with him, he only looked down, and mumbled, "Oh, hey," and walked away.

This type of cold-shoulder treatment wasn't new to me. I'm a big guy. In bare feet, I'm about 6 feet 7 inches tall, and I'm pushing 300 pounds. Yes, it can be a pain. I bump my head going through doorways, I don't fit in most mid-size cars, and I can barely squeeze into most classroom desks. But I understand that the world is made for average-sized people, and I like to think I'm above average. One thing, however, is hard for me to take: People who don't know me assume I'm mean.

Like my frosty water polo teammate. I understand why he was intimidated by me, especially since he was one of the smaller players. I would have felt the same way. When I meet people for the first time, I often draw conclusions or make assumptions. Almost all my life, I've had to deal with the expectations and judgments people make about me just because I'm often the largest kid in the room. Ever since I was a kid there has been pressure for me to perform athletically because of my size and strength.

When I went to grocery store, random people consistently asked me if I played football. When I told them, "No," the men always lectured me not only about why I should play football, but what I should be doing with my life, with my body, and with my potential. I normally just nodded and smiled, but it bothered me that they thought they knew what was best for me.

Not only did I never play football, but I defied many of the assumptions people made about me. How many people my size love nothing more than mixing up a chocolate batter, and decorating a three-layer cake? Beside my passion for baking, I also love working with little kids. For the last two summers, I volunteered at a camp where I taught kids how to surf. My nickname was Teddy

Bear. And if I wanted to make my friends fall on the ground laughing, I reminded them of my dream to learn to play the violin.

In general, I ignore what people say to me or think about me when it comes to my size. Instead of reacting, I usually just give them a smile. On many levels, there are advantages to towering over most of the world. I always get the front seat since I don't fit in the back. No one even dares call "shotgun." I usually have the best seat in the house, whether it's a rock concert or a ball game, no matter where I sit. And if people are getting rowdy and making my friends uncomfortable, all I need to do is step in the middle and simply ask, "What's going on?" and they disperse.

Even the people who are intimidated at first by me eventually come around once they get to know me. Like the water polo player at the restaurant. Within about two weeks, we finally had a conversation and ended up finding we had a lot in common. In fact, he ended up as my best friend. For me, it is a small world after all, but I wouldn't have it any other way.

Reece Barton
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New York University, New York, NY

Trash Talk

On our way to get fish tacos, about eight blocks from my house, I spotted the sign out of the corner of my eye. "Stop the car!" I shouted. Blake slammed on the brakes and threw the car into reverse. My eyes hadn't deceived me, the hand-written sign read: "Free Trampoline."

Ever since I can remember, I have loved turning other people's trash into my personal treasures. I cannot walk past a garage sale without digging through the neighbor's junk. Over the years, I have even decorated my room with accessories from various sales and giveaways.

I scored my giant box television from a church sale, towed my slipcovered couch home from my neighbor's yard sale, and rescued old-school street signs that decorate my walls from my grandma's trash. So, when I saw the sign for a free trampoline, I knew I had to make it mine.

To most, a 10-year-old trampoline wouldn't be worth dragging home, but to me, it was almost too good to be true. By bribing my friends with free tacos, I convinced them to follow the sign leading to the trampoline, and we pulled up to the house. Ahead of us were three flights of stairs up to the backyard. I jumped out of the car and, scared that someone might beat me to the front door, I sprinted up the stairs.

After what seemed like an eternity, a man answered the door. Out of breath, I asked if the trampoline was still available. "Yeah, it's out back," he said, pointing out beyond a glass door. I nearly dropped to my knees with joy.

Even though the trampoline wasn't in the best shape, it was much bigger than I imagined and all the necessary parts were there. "The deal is, if you can take it apart and out of my house, you can have it," the man called up. My jaw hit the floor. I couldn't believe this could be mine for next to nothing.

After two hours of disassembling it piece by piece, my friends and I wrestled and rolled it down the stairs, finally hoisting it onto the roof of my friend's Jetta. We didn't have any rope, so four of us walked alongside the car, supporting each corner of the trampoline all eight blocks back to my house. Drivers honked and shouted at us, but it didn't slow us down. Within an hour we had it assembled in my backyard, and we were soon lounging on the trampoline, chowing down on fish tacos.

Sometimes, I surprise myself by how far I will go to hunt down a good deal. To me, however, the deal is just the beginning. I love creating useful things out of other people's junk.

Just last week, I built a shelving system out of some scrap wood and mini-fans for my friend that was moving to college. Last winter, I made a makeshift bobsled out of two old snowboards and shopping cart wheels. I've learned that things don't lose their value after a few years of wear and tear. My neighbors' trash literally is my treasure.

Ruth Mendoza
Aptos, California
University of California, Riverside, CA

Against the Current

During my break from volunteering at the hospital, I chose to go to my favorite Mexican restaurant by the sea. While sitting next to the window, I looked into the horizon as I saw small waves wash the day's debris onto the moist sand.

As I was taking in the beautiful scenery, an elegant lady motioned me over. Not wanting to be rude, I walked over to her table.

"We're ready to order," she stated, assuming I was a waitress.

While Hollywood constantly portrays Hispanic women as being housemaids or waitresses who often speak incoherent English, the majority of Americans perceive Hispanics as uneducated and don't believe they have the potential to be successful.

I could've been the next Sonia Sotomayor or the next most powerful woman in the United States. Yet because of these stereotypes, I still would've been asked the same question.

Ever since I can remember, it's been tough, if not impossible, to fit into our small town in California. My culture and all the assumptions that go with it, always followed me. My family spoke Spanish at home, we ate enchiladas for dinner instead of pasta, and instead of shopping at our local Safeway store we went to the flea market on Sundays after church to get a *raspado* (frozen ice drink). I felt humiliated when instead of speaking flawless English, I spoke with an accent.

I heard all the grim statistics my entire life: Hispanics live in economic deprivation; they're not as likely to pursue higher education as other races and young Hispanic women are the most likely to get pregnant. As I heard these stereotypes, they began to slowly sink into my brain and haunt me as questions arose. What if I really am not as intelligent as the others? What if I don't have the fortitude to go against the current?

The choice of whether or not to allow being Hispanic be the single barrier that stood between my success and failure rested solely on me. I started to look for opportunities to change patterns, the predictions, and most of all, my self-doubt, in order to prove that we Hispanics, have the ability and potential to be successful.

The fall of my junior year, I started a tutoring group for students who faced oppressive stereotypes in my community. I knew the children deserved a safe place to obtain educational support and feel safe. It became home for many students who felt trapped within the confines of society and a stimulating intellectual environment in which they could get one-on-one help on their homework.

The progress the students made throughout the year was unbelievable. Karen, an English learner who needed extra help with her reading and writing skills, came in not being able to recite the alphabet. Now, she has the ability to write complete sentences. Julissa, another English learner who has learning disabilities, is now able to write complete sentences as well. They are some of the many students who proved that with dedication and perseverance, Hispanics do have the potential to succeed.

Because of our perseverance, the Tutoring Group became so successful that the neighboring church decided to partner with us and expand the program to include other surrounding areas. Now, when I go to college, I know these kids remain in a safe environment and become successful someday.

While misconceptions about Hispanics abound in the nation and we might not be

able to change people's perspectives right away, we can work on changing the way we feel about ourselves. Only then, can we get to work changing how others see us.

I learned that with perseverance and dedication, one has the power to enrich lives and become a leader by rising above the status quo. Something that not only I would do all over again if given the chance, but something I would encourage others to do as well.

Now, I am ready to overcome any obstacles and stereotypes on my way to success. Instead of letting them affect me negatively, I will rise and embark on a new journey in which I will prove all those who doubted me wrong.

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