

Harvard College Application Essay Examples

Two hundred and two Hot Wheels cars, each two by five inches long, adorned with flames and spoilers, lined the edges of my room. My mother would urge me to put them away and go play outside, but I never wanted to. I drove those cars all around the house. They intrigued my six-year-old self. I loved my collection that I had hand picked on my own. Every single one of those 99-cent cars was mine. I never fathomed, however, that it would not take nearly as long for that collection to disappear as it took to grow. After July 6, 2006, I never saw my collection again.

On that day, I squinted to get one last glance at the front door of my home. 50 Greenridge Way was a quaint, two-story home in a quiet suburb of Rockland County, New York. My mother was six months pregnant with me when my parents signed the papers in 1997. They were proud of themselves—they had something that was theirs. My mother and father were determined to achieve the American Dream. They saved up for their baby grand piano, and they worked hard so that my sister and I could paint our rooms pink and blue like the ones on the cover of PB Teen. They did not know, however, how fast what they attained could disappear. The unanticipated vicissitudes of owning a small business left my parents struggling to pay the mortgage, unable to feed the rapid growth of their dream. They desperately reached out for help and fell victim to a mortgage scam. Legally outsmarted and outspent, my family continued to struggle until we could no longer fight. After thousands of dollars of debt, countless phone calls, and many tears, we lost the battle. On July 6, 2006, we were told we had six hours to get out.

Six hours. Six hours to get out of something filled with nine years of work, a lot of money and an immeasurable amount of emotion—six hours to pack up our lives and move them somewhere else. Day laborers were instructed to come and throw our belongings onto the front lawn. Family and neighbors flocked over, all agreeing to store as much as they could. I scrambled to find the things important to me. I threw my blankie, my Gameboy and my Build-A-Bear into a small duffle bag. As I rushed into my aunt's car, my eyes glued to the movers tossing my mom's favorite Diego Rivera painting onto the street, I felt uneasy. Many questions should have been going through my eight-year-old head, but only one did: where are my 202 cars?

For the next five years, my family was homeless. Many doors were slammed in our faces, and we were given the "one night maximum" package in many of our family members' homes. However, the takeaway from this experience is not what I learned about the behavior of others—it is what I learned about character. The values that cannot be touched—my experience, resilience, and faith—built more character in me than any two by five inch car or baby grand piano ever will. Losing every single one of our belongings by theft and storage unit auctions, including my 202 cars, showed my family that the intangible things that got us through hardship are everlasting. The six hours spent leaving our home felt so remarkably unequivocal to the nine years we spent enriching it, or the 8 years I spent growing my car collection. However, those unexpected losses taught me that a loss of my possessions was not a loss of my character. Even in the hotels, cars, and basements, this experience showed me that no matter how little my family had, we would always have the privilege to hope.

My family has been pushed into brief bouts of homelessness since the incident, and may be facing our next bout in the coming days. Although I still worry about our financial status, a feeling of overwhelming faith creeps up my spine and deadens that anxiety. Our faith and tenacity will never be plundered like our possessions. My unseemingly unshakable phobia of losing “everything” again has diminished over the years because if I lose my possessions again, I know I will not be losing “everything.” The next chapter of my life will signal the beginning of newer, and perhaps tougher, challenges, but through all of the uncertainty and worry, I will be letting out a sigh of relief. None of our possessions, including that carefully constructed collection of two hundred and two cars, adorned with flames and spoilers, were the vehicles that drove my family through the five years of turmoil. It was our intangibles that did.