

Example #1: THE LITTLE PORCH AND A DOG

It was the first Sunday of April. My siblings and I were sitting at the dinner table giggling and spelling out words in our alphabet soup. The phone rang and my mother answered. It was my father; he was calling from prison in Oregon.

My father had been stopped by immigration on his way to Yakima, Washington, where he'd gone in search of work. He wanted to fulfill a promise he'd made to my family of owning our own house with a nice little porch and a dog.

Fortunately, my father was bailed out of prison by a family friend in Yakima. Unfortunately, though, most of our life savings were spent on his bail. We moved into a rented house, and though we did have a porch, it wasn't ours. My father went from being a *costurero* (sewing worker) to being a water-filter salesman, mosaic tile maker, lemon deliverer, and butcher.

Money became an issue at home, so I started helping out more. After school, I'd rush home to clean up and make dinner. My parents refused to let me have a "real" job, so on Saturday afternoons, I'd go to the park with my older brother to collect soda cans. Sundays and summertime were spent cleaning houses with my mother.

I worked twice as hard in school. I helped clean my church, joined the choir, and tutored my younger sister in math. As tensions eased at home, I returned to cheerleading, joined a school club called *Step Up*, and got involved in my school's urban farm, where I learned the value of healthy eating. Slowly, life improved. Then I received some life-changing news.

My father's case was still pending and, due to a form he'd signed when he was released in Yakima, it was not only him that was now in danger of being deported, it was my entire family. My father's lawyer informed me that I'd have to testify in court and in fact, our stay in the US was now dependent on my testimony.

The lawyer had an idea: I had outstanding grades and recommendation letters. If we could show the judge the importance of my family remaining here to support my education, perhaps we had a chance. So I testified.

My father won his case and was granted residency.

Living in a low-income immigrant household has taught me to appreciate all I've been given. Testifying in court helped me grow as a person, has made me more

open-minded and aware of the problems facing my community. And my involvement in the urban farm has led me to consider a career as a nutritionist.

Though neither of my parents attended college, they understand that college is a key factor to a bright future and therefore have been very supportive. And though we don't yet have the house with the small porch and the dog, we're still holding out hope.

I believe college can help.

Example #2: THE LISTMAKER

I come from a long line of list-makers. It shows up on both sides of my family, so by the time this trait reached my generation, it hit a peak. I'm a first-rate **lister**.

My chronic list-making tendencies began in fourth grade when I begged for a whiteboard and a set of Expo markers for Christmas. I started creating daily color-coordinated to-do lists replete with little checkmark boxes, and fun facts for my family to enjoy—perhaps to compensate for the fact that my large whiteboard reigned over the kitchen space.

And, while I've retired the whiteboard, I still stick with a notepad. I keep a notepad by the telephone, one on the counter, and of course, one in my backpack—some of them have new app ideas, some of them have new book ideas, maybe there's even a revolution in there somewhere.

Because I'm not just a list-maker. Words and how they shape our reality have been a driving force in my life...

As a writer, I am constantly constructing reality. Writing on a page has a physicality: each word by itself could seem mundane and even unimaginative, but the way I choose to arrange them on the page makes them meaningful. Someone reads them, and now my words exist in the world as their own object.

As a debater, I edit on paper, I write on paper, I read on paper. And when I voice the words and put them into the world, someone's perception is changed, for better or for worse.

As an artist, I spin my words into portraits of people, landscapes of nature, even cartoons of fantastical polka-dotted critters. My loose-leaf pages are a

sanctuary from the rigors of “productivity,” and each doodle represents the language of my dreams and imagination.

There is something wonderful about a physical pen with graceful ink in my control that a handwritten list can solely provide, and that I will not grow out of. Lists go hand in hand with refreshing walks and a cup of hot chocolate in the morning: they are always there for me, to be read or put away or kept tucked away in a drawer or pocket—within reach.

Best of all, lists have a way of clarifying things: You can’t really mess around with a 3 by 5 note pad; you have to get to the absolute essence of an idea. At that moment between thinking a thing and writing it down, a shift takes place. Once I’ve got it down on paper, it’s going to happen.