

New York University College of Arts and Science \$39,500 Scholarship by Ana

Prompt: Explain something that made a big impact in throughout your life.

“If you can’t live off of it, it is useless.” My parents were talking about ice skating: my passion. I started skating as a ten-year-old in Spain, admiring how difficulty and grace intertwine to create beautiful programs, but no one imagined I would still be on the ice seven years and one country later. Even more unimaginable was the thought that ice skating might become one of the most useful parts of my life.

I was born in Mexico to two Spanish speakers; thus, Spanish was my first language. We then moved to Spain when I was six, before finally arriving in California around my thirteenth birthday. Each change introduced countless challenges, but the hardest part of moving to America, for me, was learning English. Laminated index cards, color-coded and full of vocabulary, became part of my daily life. As someone who loves to engage in a conversation, it was very hard to feel as if my tongue was cut off.

Only at the ice rink could I be myself; the feeling of the cold rink breeze embracing me, the ripping sound of blades touching the ice, even the occasional ice burning my skin as I fell—these were my few constants. I did not need to worry about mispronouncing “axel” as “aksal.” Rather, I just needed to glide and deliver the jump.

From its good-natured bruise-counting competitions to its culture of hard work and perseverance, ice skating provided the nurturing environment that made my other challenges worthwhile. Knowing that each moment on the ice represented a financial sacrifice for my family, I cherished every second I got. Often this meant waking up every morning at 4 a.m. to practice what I had learned in my few precious minutes of coaching.

It meant assisting in group lessons to earn extra skating time and taking my conditioning off-ice by joining my high school varsity running teams. Even as I began to make friends and lose my fear of speaking, the rink was my sanctuary. Eventually, however, the only way to keep improving was to pay for more coaching, which my family could not afford. And so I started tutoring Spanish.

Now, the biggest passion of my life is supported by my most natural ability. I have had over thirty Spanish students, ranging in age from three to forty and spanning many ethnic backgrounds. I currently work with fifteen students each week, each with different needs and ways of learning. Drawing on my own experiences as both a second language-learner and a figure skater, I assign personal, interactive exercises, make jokes to keep my students’ mindset positive, and never give away right answers.

When I first started learning my axel jump, my coach told me I would have to fall at least 500 times (about a year of falls!) in order to land it. Likewise, I have my students embrace every detail of a mistake until they can begin to recognize new

errors when they see them. I encourage them to expand their horizons and take pride in preparing them for new interactions and opportunities.

Although I agree that I will never live off of ice skating, the education and skills I have gained from it have opened countless doors. Ice skating has given me the resilience, work ethic, and inspiration to develop as a teacher and an English speaker. It has improved my academic performance by teaching me rhythm, health, and routine. It also reminds me that a passion does not have to produce money in order for it to hold immense value.

Ceramics, for instance, challenges me to experiment with the messy and unexpected. While painting reminds me to be adventurous and patient with my forms of self-expression. I don't know yet what I will live off of from day to day as I mature; however, the skills my passions have provided me are life-long and irreplaceable.

Fund for Education Abroad Rainbow Scholarship \$7,500 by Steven Fisher

Prompt: The Fund for Education Abroad is committed to diversifying education abroad by providing funding to students who are typically under-represented in study abroad. Please describe how you and/or your plans for study abroad could be viewed as under-represented.

“Oh well look at that one,” my uncle leans over and says about my brother-in-law in the living room wearing a dress. “I’d always had my suspicions about him,” he jokes with a disapproving sneer and leans back in his chair, a plate of Southern-style Christmas dinner in his hand.

I was hurt. Why would my own uncle say that like it’s such a terrible thing that my brother-in-law is wearing a dress? That it was the worst thing in the world if my brother-in-law were gay or effeminate.

“I think he looks beautiful,” my oldest brother Ethan chimes in. At that moment, I wish I could have hugged Ethan. No, not because he was defending my brother-in-law (who actually isn’t gay, as my uncle was suggesting), but because Ethan was defending me. My uncle has no idea that I recognized earlier this past year that heterosexuality wasn’t meeting all of my needs for intimacy with other people and that I’ve come to define myself as queer. It all started when I took a hard look at how my upbringing in Miami had taught me that the only way that boys are supposed to connect with others is by having sex with “beautiful” girls - that intimacy with other guys or “ugly” girls isn’t as meaningful.

After freeing up that block in my brain that told me that I shouldn’t look at guys in a certain way, I could embrace the fact that I’m attracted to men (and people in general) in a lot of different, new ways. My growth as a person was exponential. I rewrote so many areas of my life where I didn’t do things I wanted because of social conditioning. Within two months, my world expanded to include polyamory. I looked back on my past relationship with my girlfriend and realized that I wasn’t jealous (angry, yes. hurt, yes. But not jealous) when she cheated on me.

I realized that people’s needs – whether they are for sex, someone to talk to, someone to engage intellectually – don’t necessarily all have to be met with one person. It can be easier sometimes with one person, absolutely. But that’s not the only way. As someone who is both polyamorous and queer, I feel like parts of my family and large parts of my community marginalize me for being different because society has told them to. I want to change that.

Since I will be studying for an entire year in Prague, I will have the opportunity to attend the annual Mezipatra, an international film festival in November that screens around a hundred top-ranking films on lesbian, bisexual, transsexual and queer themes. I feel really connected to going to this event because I crave being in an

environment of like-minded people who strive to do that same thing I want to: balance the images of people typically portrayed through cliché and stereotype.

When I came out to my sister-in-law, she told me that people who are really set in their ways are more likely to be tolerant to different kinds of people after having relationships with these people. If my uncle can learn to love me, to learn to love one queer/poly person, he can learn to love them all. If I can be an example to my family, I can be an example to my classmates. If I can get the opportunity to travel abroad, I can be an example to the world. Not just through my relationships, but through my art. Give me a camera and a screen and I will carry the message of tolerance from the audiences of Mezipatra in Prague to my parent's living room.

Questbridge Finalist essay earning \$3,000 in application waivers plus \$3000 in local scholarships by Jordan Sanchez

Prompt: Some students have a background, identity, interest, or talent that is so meaningful they believe their application would be incomplete without it. If this sounds like you, then please share your story.

Recall the most cherished memory with your father figure. For some it may be when he taught you how to ride a bike, for others it may be memories of him taking you out for pizza when mom said the family has to eat healthy, for others it's the ability to confide in somebody that won't judge or stop loving you because of the mistakes you have made. When a child is born, he or she is given a birth certificate, which provides information such as name, date and place of birth, but most importantly it provides the names of the parents of the child. On my birth certificate I have the name the name of my beloved mother Lurvin, but right above her name is an empty space where my father's name should be.

As a child I would often compare my life to my peers; I would often go through all of these hypothetical scenarios in my mind thinking, "If my dad were around, I could be like all of the other boys." As the years went by, I always had a sense of optimism that one day I would meet him and he would tell me "I love you and I'll never leave your side again." But when the time came and I met him on January 2014 I learned that a man can reject his only son not once, but twice.

My father left when I was one year old and I will soon be turning 17; I did the math and found that for about 5900 days he has neglected me. He was able to sleep 5900 nights without knowing whether or not I was dead or alive. Even though he's been gone for 5900 days, my life did not get put on hold. In those 5900 days I learned how to walk, talk, and I became a strong young man without the provider of my Y Chromosome because he is nothing more to me than that.

In the past I believed that my father was necessary to rise but instead I found that false hope was an unnecessary accessory and now I refuse to let the fact that I am fatherless define the limits of the great things that I can accomplish.

It's said that boys learn to be a man from their fathers, that they learn what it means to be a man that has values and can stand up for what's right. I, however, have found that grit can come from anywhere. When I was in middle school, I was overweight and many other boys would call me names, and even after going to administration several times nothing changed and for several years, I kept myself at bay because if I had done anything in return, I would be no better than those guys who bullied me.

I previously had this perception that somebody else would come to my rescue, that somebody else would provide the mental strength to combat the hardships that were sent my way. But as time passed, I grew tired of waiting for help that was never going to come so I had to become my own hero. Since making that decision I have been

liberated from the labels that previously confined me and I took back control of my own life.

My ability to be self-motivated has assisted me in becoming a leader in several of my extracurricular activities. I was one of the 4 male students of my school district that was selected as a delegate by the American Legion to participate at the Boy's State program and I am also the captain of my group in the Young Senator's Leadership Program that is run by California Senator Tony Mendoza. I also developed skills on the wrestling mat. On one occasion I wrestled the person who was ranked the 9th best wrestler in the state and although I did not win there was not a single second that I was afraid to fail because I knew I gave it my all. Similarly, I have put the same effort into becoming a successful.

My father's name is not on my birth certificate, but it is MY birth certificate. My origins are not the brightest but I was given a life that is mine to live and because "Life is made of two dates and a dash." I have to "...Make most of the dash." I am not going to live forever but if I were to leave this world today, I would feel content with the person I see in the mirror.

I know the difficulty that Latinos face in this day and age I can envision assisting other young Latinos achieving their dreams. I believe the most valuable thing in this world is opportunity because sometimes all it takes for someone to be successful is a chance to do so. Consequently, I would like to be part of that chance that can foster the growth of future success.

Change a Life Foundation Scholarship Essay Examples by Isabella Mendez-Figueroa

Prompt: Please explain a personal hardship or catastrophic life event that you have experienced. How did you manage to overcome this obstacle? What did you learn and how did you grow from it? This answer is critical to your application as Change a Life Foundation's vision is to assist individuals who have persevered and overcome a hardship/catastrophic life event.

Filling out this application, and my college applications, has forced me to face head on the realities that I've grown up in. Looking back and describing my life I see all the ways in which I am disadvantaged due to my socioeconomic status. But I think it's important to note that I wasn't fully aware of any of it growing up. I knew that my parents couldn't buy me everything, but I also knew that they hardly ever said no. I was a very normal child, asking for chicken nuggets and looking at mom and dad any time I was scared or unsure of something. As I've grown, I've learned to fight my own monsters but I now also battle the ones that frighten my parents, the monsters of a world that they weren't born into. Monsters of doubt and disadvantage that try to keep them stuck in a cycle of poverty; thriving in a world that casts them to the side and a society that, with its current political climate, doesn't welcome them with the warmest hello.

The baby sitter, the house keeper, the driver, it's taken my dad 10+ years of night shifts to attain financial stability, and become an asset to his workplace. He's been one of the millions of people who has been laid off in the last couple of decades and has had to start over multiple times. But each time he's re-built himself with more resilience. I've grown up living in section 8 housing because my parents often found themselves living paycheck to paycheck, not by choice, but by circumstance. They've endured bankruptcy over credit card debt, have never owned a home, or been given access to resources that allow them to save. Every time we've readapted, we get struck by a new change. I currently live in Manchester Square, a ghost town, byproduct of the Los Angeles Airport expansion project.

The 16 steps I have always known, soon to be demolished. My neighbors are empty lots, enclosed by fences. Homeless people's pitch tents, under the roar of airplanes. My home is soon to become an accommodation to an airport, soon to be nonexistent. Knowing that my family has to relocate as I'm applying to college makes me feel a tad guilty, because of my lack of resources, I fear it will become a barrier into my transition to college. My parent's finances are not a secret, I know their struggles as I hear about them day after day. My parents now deal with the burden of relocating, no longer having subsidized housing and again, struck by yet another need to readjust and reassemble. Relocating a family of 5 in an area plagued by gentrification of stadiums and demolition is no simple task as rent prices are as high as mortgages. It's odd they don't want me to stress or have it become my problem but I know it is, and I want to do whatever I can to help.

My older sister is the first in my family to go to college. I was always the shyer one. She's taught me through her efforts that the only limits you have are the ones you place on yourself. With my sister's example I have followed in the footsteps of never letting money become a reason why I can't or won't do something. If my sister can do it, I can do it. I see the leadership characteristic is genetic and it runs in my entire family. I witness my parents be leaders everyday as they tackle cultural obstacles in a country that wasn't the one, they were born into, speaking a language that is not their own, and raising children to succeed in a system of higher education; one they never had the privilege to be part of. My family and I are one.

We stack our efforts, and obstacles on top of each other to further our successes as a whole. When I think back to my family's story, I'm amazed to think that my grandpa came to the US in the midst of WW2, a bracero, leaving his family to help feed millions of Americans in time of war. My grandpa, a man of the fields, paved the way so I could defy the odds with my prosperity.

At home, the teacher role often switches within my family. I am responsible for translating documents to my parents and explaining procedures and concepts as I, myself, am learning them. I have had the responsibility of helping assist my younger sister who has a mild case of Cerebral Palsy. Due to her pre-existing condition, she is a slow learner. I have dedicated a lot of time this past year, helping her with her transition from elementary to middle school and helping her adapt to such a drastic change.

Sometimes, I only sleep 4 hours as I wake up and rush out the door in order to make it on time to 6am tutoring. Having to manage my schoolwork and home responsibilities has been difficult but I've managed to maintain high academic achievement by managing my time correctly and being persistent. If I truly want something, I need to go after it, and I will get it done. Sometimes being tired isn't an option.