

College Narrative Essay

As I opened the giant doors the sun pierced my eyes, forcing me to squint just to make sense of the parking lot. It was a hot day, almost 90 degrees, but it still felt cool compared to the smoldering 110 degrees of my work station. I tried to look down the seemingly endless rows of cars, shielding my eyes from the tremendous glare that reflected off the windshields. I had blocked the sun with mild success, but my vision had become blurry from the sweat dripping into my eyes. It felt like I had been swimming in the ocean with my eyes open all day, and based on my appearance an observer would have thought I had done this in my clothes. I tried rubbing my eyes with my t-shirt to remove the burning saltiness, but since my shirt was soaked through, my actions only intensified the pain. After a few moments I was finally able to make sense of the parking lot and I began my trek toward my car.

Unfortunately, Lincoln Electric has a parking lot that would rival most major amusement parks. It wouldn't be a problem if I were an executive or an actual employee, but welding school students had reserved parking at the very back of the lot, three quarters of a mile from the building. I had been walking for what felt like an eternity, yet I didn't feel any closer to my car because of the stifling heat that I could see and feel.

Eventually I saw my jeep through the thick haze, which was what I needed to reassure myself that this parking lot did end and that it didn't just fade into the horizon. When I finally arrived at my car, I hesitantly got in. Fatigue had consumed my body, and any excitement I felt about leaving was dampened because I knew I would have to return early the next morning.

Becoming a welder, I am convinced, is one of the hardest things any 18-year-old can do. My summer of factory work and school was the best and worst experience of my life. I learned more about life in 90 days than I had learned in the past 18 years, though this did not come easily. While my friends were sleeping, at 6:45, I was showered and dressed. I often wanted to call in sick and just catch up on all my sleep, and at times, I couldn't see the benefit in going to work, especially when I looked at my arms and examined the burns on them. By this point my protective leathers had become worn and the molten metal spitting from the arc had begun to burn my skin. Yet, these days when I didn't want to work were the days when I learned the most. Between the long car rides and almost endless walks I realized what was happening. If the summer taught me anything it taught me what I didn't want to be, and what I have to do to ensure this. School, for example, has now become more important than it had ever been before.

My newfound appreciation for education alone was worth the grueling experience, but welding gave me so much more. My whole life I had fit in, but on the first day of work I was the outsider. Not only had I not had any welding experience, but I also had not been exposed to factory life on that level. I had no idea what it was like to be up every morning before dawn, and I had no idea what manual labor was all about. In previous summers, I worked as a landscaper, but even the challenges I experienced then paled in comparison to true blue-collar work. Fortunately, the other employees at Lincoln Electric didn't know of my sheltered work experience. Generally, to factory workers, kids like me had no business being in the shop. These men knew what it was like to work in order to eat. They knew that the company depended on their output, though often times their pay didn't represent their importance. To them kids like me didn't have any idea what it is like to walk in their shoes. After my experiences there, I would have to

agree. I had no idea about the commitment, dedication and perseverance it takes to show up for factory work every day.

By the end of the summer I learned what welding was all about. It is not about “gluing” metal together, it is about the pride and the bonds you form with your partners. It’s about being able to look at your partner, not saying a word, and knowing what they’re going through. It’s about the pride we take knowing that without us ships would sink, pipes wouldn’t fit, and bridges would crumble. One summer of welding changed my life. I experienced something most people never will. I went from being the outsider to one of the guys. The intangible lessons welding has taught me couldn’t possibly be matched by any high school, and for these reasons and because of these experiences, I am proud to call myself a certified welder.

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