
Behind the Lens: College Admission Essay Sample

My favorite place in the world is behind the lens of a camera. When I was fourteen, I saved every penny I made babysitting and washing dishes for a Canon t2i, and the satisfaction that came with the overpowering smell of lens cleaner and the ability to capture any moment at the click of a button was well worth it. I took my new camera everywhere: to the opposite side of the world, to school events, and to the top of the very first mountain I summited. My camera was a security blanket; I felt comfortable with it constantly in front of my face or around my neck. I suddenly wanted to be everywhere at once, in the middle of the action. And then my aunt was diagnosed with cancer.

The news hit with the same impact of swallowing too fast: my throat closed up while my stomach jumped to it, and my body shook as if trying to spit back the words. I was terrified to know that someone who meant the world to me was dying, and I knew that I couldn't face it without some type of armor. I took my camera with me on the plane, quickly clicking it on and off to occupy my shaking hands; I hadn't eaten for two days, certain that my stomach wasn't as strong as I was trying to be. When I arrived, before I could even knock on the door, my aunt opened it, scooping me into a big bear hug. For the rest of the day, everyone held their emotional shields in front of themselves. Forced smiles and empty laughs filled the rooms while my aunt acted as if everything was normal. I wanted to savor the experience of being with her without being suffocated by the feelings that came with it. Watching my aunt's battle was draining, but through my lens I gained a new perspective. Pressing a button and hearing the whir of the shutter's quick open and close gave me time to take a step back and pause. But, rather than distancing myself, I found myself becoming more in touch with my feelings.

Bits of my armor fell away as the week progressed. I hardly expected my camera to have such a significant role at that point in my life, but what I had originally intended as protection from feelings ended up revealing more than I would have imagined. My camera's job was originally to capture pictures, things I saw, but through its lens, my eyes saw so much more. My photographs were memories of extreme highs and lows of one of my family's hardest weeks together. Capturing my little cousin's expression as her fingers slammed into the keyboard in my aunt's living room, shaking with the giggles, was the first time I genuinely smiled. I captured the intimate, unexpected moments of my most precious relationships. I was always happiest behind my camera, but superficial happiness developed into sincere appreciation for what it showed me. My camera betrayed me by not protecting me from my feelings, but it gave me the strength to examine life's transitions with the serenity that I feel when I'm behind the lens.

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