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## Take Off the Privilege Glasses: College Admission Essay Sample

A middle aged woman enters the riding arena with what looks like a rag doll draped over her forearms. Her face has the furrowed brow of melancholy, but her tone is hopeful when she speaks to me. “Esta es mi hija Mili (this is my daughter Mili),” she says, handing over the little bundle like an offering. As I draw Mili into my arms, my legs wrapped tightly around the barrel of the horse beneath us, I realize she is indeed a tiny human, living and breathing the same as myself. With this exchange comes a mountain of responsibility; rising to the occasion is mandatory.

I place my hand beneath Mili's chin to prevent her head from falling forward (her neck muscles lack the strength to do so on their own). Her eyes, big and brown with a rim of thick lashes, roll back in their sockets and she meets my gaze. I look long and hard while doing my best to murmur the encouraging phrases taught by the equine therapy specialist. Then Mili grunts. Our horse trips slightly on a rock and she grunts again, louder this time, a foreign, guttural noise. Her appearance and mannerisms are unlike any child's I've seen before. Her arms are brittle and shriveled, reminding me of a T-Rex's. Holding her to my chest, I'm shocked to feel bones through her clothes.

Mili exposed me to existence in its most rudimentary form. Before arriving at the project site in Argentina, I'd envisioned myself working in a Horseboy-type scenario. I imagined autism, maybe Down syndrome, but the thought of working with children even more severely disabled never occurred to me. In the U.S. a mother handing over her special-needs child to a non-professional volunteer would be rare; we Americans are far less trusting.

Perplexing questions about humanity filled my head after that first interaction. Surviving and living, synonyms in the English dictionary, take on very different meanings in this context. Mili's life revolves around merely meeting basic survival needs, in contrast to the complexity of my own. She presented a type of rawness unfamiliar to me. I was shocked by my reaction. As a babysitter of seven years, I know that children bring me joy. But Mili took me by surprise. She made me question: does seeing people different than me make me uncomfortable because it forces me to acknowledge my privileges? Gender, racial, and economic privilege are all thoroughly discussed topics, but able privilege is something altogether different and seldom recognized. Being thrown into a situation that blatantly revealed the profound extent of my privilege placed a new lens of appreciation on my perception of the world. Millions of able bodies are thrashed by sports, shamed for their imperfections, or denied care by their owners.

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The body is seen as an indestructible machine. We often forget that access to a functioning machine, however, is not a God-given right. An able body is a blessing.

My project at the equine therapy barn was not a teen program. I'd chosen to surround myself with older volunteers and was expected to act like one. Working alongside such passionate, grounded people from five different countries inspired me to find those qualities in myself. I believe that what distinguishes child from adult is not age, but maturity of thought. A mature perspective sees beyond surface value and invests time and energy into understanding things for all that they are. To give Mili the love she deserved, I had to disregard our circumstantial differences, embrace our common humanity, and meet her as an equal. To notice not her frail exterior, but the soul it housed. Her fight for life had perhaps forged a spirit far stronger than my own.

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