
The Outdoors and Life: College Admission Essay Sample

I was practically born on the river. Both of my parents were extreme whitewater raft guides, and they passed on their love of the river and nature in general to me. From a young age, my parents took me rafting on rivers like the San Juan, the Grand Canyon, and the Klamath, and I still enjoy rafting those rivers to this day. My dad was a guide on the Grand Canyon, and he still does the occasional trip down that incredible river, and my mom guided all over the world while competing in raft races and doing first descents of rivers in exotic and remote places. They both have taught me many lessons during my time spent on boats, rowing boats, and paddling, many of which apply to real life. One lesson that my mom taught me is that a rapid is, in a sense, a metaphor for life. You need to first look at where you want to go, and spot the obstacles in your way in order to plan a safe route to get there.

When rowing a technical rapid, the first thing to do is stand up and take a good look at what it is exactly that you're up against, what obstacles you have to avoid in order to make it safely to the end. This may take a minute, and sometimes you may even want to step out of the boat and take in the big picture to formulate your plan. This is often the hardest step. However, it is the most important. How can one expect to make it where they want to go without even knowing where that is? Once the plan has been formulated, it will be put to the test. Each move that was planned must now be executed with precision and strength in order to stay clear of the obstacles. In the case of rafting, obstacles vary from rocks to holes to pour-overs or trees, but in life, they can be anything. In the heat of the action, it is easy to see the value of planning, because one can anticipate every twist and turn of the future. However, when curveballs are thrown and the unexpected happens, skill is needed to navigate a temporary new route. With every obstacle passed, the goal becomes closer; the light at the end of the tunnel becomes visible.

In the summer between my Freshman and Sophomore year of high school, I went on the Klamath River, in Northern California, with a large group of family and friends. As we were preparing the boats to launch, it came to my knowledge that I was to row my very own boat. It would be the first time I'd had that responsibility. This little, white raft was all mine, and I was in charge of taking it and its precious cargo (food and myself) down the river safely. I was terrified. When I approached the first rapid, my mom yelled to me, "Think about what I always tell you; know where you want to go and how to get there." That set off a lightbulb in my brain, and I immediately stood up and plotted my course of action. I rowed furiously through this little rapid, and made calculated moves to avoid each obstacle; I exerted the force of every muscle in my body to row left around a foreboding hole, and right around a sharp rock. All my calculations and hard work paid off, I made it through. I floated safely through the rapid, and sat, breathless,

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for a few minutes afterwards. It was so validating to experience the success of this method, and I decided it needed to be applied to my life.

From the everyday goals of cleaning my room, practicing my vocal exercises (I'm a singer), and getting some fun in too, I plan out my days for maximum efficiency, and I always feel fulfilled. On a broader scale, I look at the goals I have for my life, and I plot out ways I know I can reach them. Although I'm not yet sure what exactly it is that I want to do with my career, I have an ultimate goal of being happy and successful, just like I was when I safely made it through my first white-water rapid.

My time spent on the rivers of the Western United States have taught me so much about life, happiness, nature, goals, and so much more. The main thing I have taken away from all of my river rafting experiences is the idea that I need to first decide where I want to be, and plan how to get there before I can reach my goals. It may be cliché to say that life is like a river, but I have discovered that there are indeed many similarities.

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