
Where Was I: College Admission Essay Sample

The day: December 27th, 2007. The time: 6:45 PM. The location: Karachi, Pakistan. There was nothing out of the ordinary on this crisp December day, or so I thought. I did not know that this ordinary day would soon become one of the most important days in the history of not only Pakistan, but also the rest of the world. My family and I were visiting my cousins in Pakistan for winter break. We didn't usually go out to dinner on weekdays, but because my cousin had just won a special award, we all decided to go out that night. The restaurant was located about five minutes from my uncle's house, so it was a fairly short drive. We left the house around 6:30, and ordered our food at 6:42. During the wait, I thought briefly about how the lights had been going out at my cousins' house for the last couple of days, and how the restaurant would be thrown into a state of panic were such a thing to happen here. However, I knew that the restaurant used an electric generator, and I quickly dismissed the thought. About a minute later, the lights started flickering, and I heard three sounds that resembled gun shots. I didn't think much of it - my first thought was that it was a couple of kids playing with fireworks. Soon after, all the lights shut off and people started whispering and screaming. I didn't know what was going on, but then my grandmother told us that Benazir Bhutto, the former prime minister of Pakistan, had been assassinated. Just as I had predicted, everyone began panicking and running out of the restaurant. My family of nine gathered together, aware that we had to get back home as soon as possible. The assassination of Ms. Bhutto was an enormous shock to the country, and some people were rebelling by detonating bombs and initiating other violent acts.

Characters on TV are constantly being thrown into life-threatening situations in which they have to act quickly and make difficult choices. I always thought that if placed in such a situation I would save everyone before myself, but I was never sure of what choices I would make. No one can predict their behavior in a crisis, but I am glad that when the time came I made the right choice and ensured that each member of my family was safe and calm before considering my own well-being. We quickly went outside, and my uncle and cousin went to get their cars while the rest of us waited. I held onto my grandmother's hand to make sure she stayed with us. When my cousin arrived with his car, six of us squeezed in. Luckily, the drive was short, and my cousin was able to take alleys, avoiding the main roads where the trouble had surely begun. Once we got home, my grandfather ran to turn the news on. Every single channel was talking about how someone had managed to kill Benazir Bhutto while she was campaigning for the upcoming elections in Pakistan. It was said that someone had shot her in the head and the chest, and had detonated a bomb right next to her car.

I was shocked, dumbfounded, and panicked all at once. I was particularly struck by the fact that

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my dad had been at a business conference in a city close to where the assassination took place. I could not believe that people were behaving like criminals at a time like this. Videos were being shown of people destroying random cars on the street with hockey sticks and stones, and then stealing from the cars; it was total chaos outside. It was announced that all the shops, businesses and marketplaces were going to be closed for the next three days in mourning. I was not only worried for the safety of my family in Karachi, but also for my dad in Lahore. We began getting calls from friends and relatives in the US and Canada, checking on us to make sure we were all safe. For the next three days, we were basically under house arrest; we couldn't even leave to get food and supplies. My dad called to let us know that he was okay, but that he was planning to reschedule his flight for three days later, when it would be safer to move about.

Never before had I read so much and seen so many videos on the internet all regarding the same subject. Later on, we learned that Benazir didn't die from bullet wounds; she was trying to duck from the gunshots, hit her head on the sunroof of her car, and ultimately died from a brain injury. All of these facts were circling my brain, and I didn't know what to do with them. When this incident happened, I realized the brevity of life, and how it can be taken away in mere seconds. Mrs. Bhutto did not know that she would die that day; her family did not know that they would lose a mother and a wife; the people of Pakistan did not know that they would lose a leader. From this experience, I learned to always act cautiously and make sure I have no regrets.

When Benazir Bhutto died, I realized that even though I am only in my first year of college, there is so much I can still do to help myself, and others, as well. The University of Southern California is full of people who know where they want to be and how much work they have to put in to get there. Previously, I didn't know what I needed to do to prepare myself for my work as a biochemist. However, I have been through an ordeal that has taught me so much about life, and about what I need to do to accomplish my goals. More than ever, I am determined to get where I want to be, and nothing is going to stop me. I now understand the brevity of life and that I may not have all the time I thought I would have to accomplish my goals. Few people learn this lesson over the course of their lifetimes, and I have learned this in only seventeen years of existence. I can be a great asset to the University of Southern California because I belong there, and because I know that I will push myself to prove this. In today's age, personal initiative is a far better indicator of success than inherited privilege. Life is a blank slate, and it is within our power to write the story of our lives.

I am not going to brag about my college grades, my activities or my community service, because that is not differentiable in people. I am not trying to prove that I am better than every single candidate, but I know that the University of Southern California needs someone like me. One thing I can definitely ensure is that no other candidate has been through this kind of

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experience. People talk about the Reagan or Kennedy assassination and ask where people were and what they were doing when these important political personalities were killed. Where was I when Benazir Bhutto was assassinated? I was there, in Pakistan, experiencing everything alongside my fellow citizens. And although those were the scariest days of my life, they taught me a great deal about myself and my future. There is no better teacher than experience, and for this subject I had the best teacher in the world.

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