

Admissions Essay Overcoming a Struggle

One of my favorite expressions is “there is no strength, where there is no struggle.” This summarizes the bulk of my life and all that I had to overcome in order to succeed. The bulk of my struggle came from the fact that my parents were never around. I was the eldest of two, with three years separating me from my little brother. My memories of my father are few: my mother said that he had a rough childhood, something that set him up for addiction later in life. He spent the early years of my childhood in and out of drug rehabilitation programs until one day he just disappeared, something that hurt my mother very deeply. It definitely hurt my brother and I profoundly, but our pain seemed to pale in comparison to the agony that this abandonment inflicted on my mother. She lost her job in marketing and struggled to find another one, while wavering in between severe bouts of depression. She was around, but she was seldom present, and when she was present she was deeply resentful of us kids. Things were very clear to me back then: I could either become like my parents and feel saddled with resentment and allow the dysfunction that I was surrounded with to overcome me, or I could carve out a different path. I chose the latter: one reason for this was I saw how profoundly my parents’ bad childhoods had impacted them and made them suffer, but more importantly, made them decide to continue suffering. I didn’t want that for myself, and I especially didn’t want that for my younger brother.

I decided that this was a big opportunity for me to turn an awful situation into one of reasonable stability—as much as I could hopefully control. I spoke to my mom one day and I asked if she would let me write checks from her checkbook each month for the electric bill, cable bill, etc. Our electricity had been shut off before, simply because my mother hadn’t cared enough to pay the bill. This was something that scared my little brother immensely and something I wanted to avoid again. My mother said I could do it. I also asked her if she would let me do the grocery shopping each week, as long as I didn’t spend too much. She gave me a budget and I promised to stick to it. I started running the household chores, bill-

paying and other duties and that helped for my brother and I to experience more stability, something that I noticed gave him a great deal of stability in his life, and mine as well. I made sure that my little brother was enrolled in positive after-school activities like soccer, and art classes—things that could help him express some of his more pent-up emotions like anxiety and sadness.

Doing things like this gave me an extreme sense of empowerment, and also gave me a heightened sense of security and safety. It helped me to worry less and showed me that it was possible for me to feel a sense of control over my life. This was a very powerful lesson: I didn't have to let my parents' sense of destruction or disappointment chart the course of my life or influence me in a negative way. And I certainly wasn't going to watch my little brother fall down some path of hopelessness or despair. There are some days when I wish I had a normal family and parents who cared more about us, but I see the bigger picture: these life lessons have taught me something priceless.