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### Reflective Essay

When I look back on my brief life, I notice that I have changed greatly. I began as a confident child with strong opinions about life and a willingness to vocalize them. I was not intimidated by the world. However, my perception of the world and my place in it changed dramatically during the ages of eleven and twelve. Most of this was precipitated by my parents' separation and divorce, puberty, changing schools, and the loss of a best friend. I went from a young person who wanted to protect animals with aspirations of becoming a veterinarian to an overwhelmed, insecure introvert. I spent the next six years processing these changes and my understanding of the world - four years of which took place in high school. This has been a difficult phase of my life.

I know that I am an introvert and gather energy when I am alone and can decompress from the interactions of my day. I am a visual learner and need to see examples or models of expected outcomes if I am to be successful. I am empathetic towards animals - creatures with no voice – the underdog. I became a vegetarian at the age of eleven. This is unusual for someone of my age and at this point in time. It is not common. It made it even more uncomfortable for me to engage in social situations as once it was learned that I did not eat meat, people became defensive and began questioning my choice. I always felt that I had to justify my feelings to others and so avoided social situations altogether. This made my high school experience even more uncomfortable.

After I finished the sixth grade and left Maplewood School to attend Hayhurst School during the seventh and eighth grades, my academic achievement plummeted. I had been a strong student and always placed in the highest reading and math groups. This ended with the transition to seventh grade and continued throughout my high school experience. I cannot say if it was because I was struggling with personal issues to the extent that they clouded my ability to learn effectively or the quality of my education. I tend to think it was both. My previous desire to be a veterinarian was shattered with my self-confidence and the onset of depression. I had an unfortunate experience in my eighth grade Algebra class that was very traumatic and resulted in me losing all confidence in my ability to succeed in math classes. I dropped my biology class when I learned that I would have to dissect a frog. It is against my strong ethical convictions. These two experiences confirmed that I would not pursue a future heavy in math and the sciences. Luckily, I had the support of my mother. She is my best friend and my rock. She sacrificed much for my sister and me. My mother, my sister, and I love each other tremendously.

I did take guitar lessons for two years and was strongly encouraged to continue by my teacher who saw some aptitude for music in me. I eventually lost interest because I had no one to play with. Most of my free time was consumed reading books and listening to music. Books and music gave me the greatest comfort. I consumed both ravenously. I wrote a few poems and took a few art classes in high school that I enjoyed. The most impactful part of my high school experience was meeting my counselor, Mr. Birt.

Mr. Birt was a wonderfully tolerant man. I spent my free time in between classes in his office. It was the safest place in the school for me. Mr. Birt also happened to have a private practice outside school and counseled people with personal problems. My mom took me to talk with him every Saturday. He made high school bearable.

During my senior year I began to come out of a deep five year depression. I started to make friends and open up. Some of my artwork was photographed for the yearbook. I had my first boyfriend. I wrote a letter to the editor of the school paper championing some participants in a recent assembly who were treated horribly by the audience. This is consistent with my results on the Myer Briggs personality assessment, which characterized me as a champion of the downtrodden. This is also consistent with my deep concern for animals and humanitarian issues. My community service project reflects these personal characteristics.

I chose to participate in a walkathon for Greenpeace. I am a member of the organization. I spent hours getting sponsors and finally participated in the 20 kilometer walk through Forest Park in Portland. I did this alone. There were several other people participating but most of them were adults in pairs or groups. This was the longest distance I had ever walked and luckily the weather was good. While I was “alone”, I was also working together with several like minded people to make the world a better place. I learned that I liked to work with others towards a meaningful goal. I learned that I could commit to a goal, carry it out independently, and complete it successfully. This was a step towards participating in the world actively and emerging from a protective shell that I had been hiding in since the sixth grade.

At this point in time, I have no idea what I want to do with my life. I have been accepted to The University of Oregon and plan to attend in the fall following my graduation. I visited the campus with my father and it is beautiful. There seems to be a concern for the environment and humanitarian issues in this college community, so it will probably be a good fit for me. During the summer, I will be working at Standard Insurance Company as an administrative clerk. This is in the heart of downtown Portland, and I am looking forward to being downtown and earning money. Other than that, I am leaving myself open to future possibilities.