



Common Application: Personal Statement

“Discuss an accomplishment, event, or realization that sparked a period of personal growth and a new understanding of yourself or others.”

I walked toward the Brickyard Café with a feeling of restlessness in my stomach. Tonight was the culmination of weeks spent organizing between Simpson County Democratic Party and my school’s Young Democrats club. The countless number of phone calls with the offices of state politicians had worked: we had secured their time to speak at a fundraiser in our rural town of Franklin, Kentucky. It was the first time any politician beyond our mayor had stepped foot in Simpson County in recent history – but something didn’t feel quite right. I pushed my nerves aside as I reached the entryway and opened the door with a bright, political smile on my face.

I entered the room, my eyes scanning for the line of tables stacked with chafing dishes. Guests were already lined up for dinner.

Where is she? She should be manning her station by now.

I made my rounds around the room, greeting attendees and thanking them for their support. But their responses rang empty in my mind.

Is she late?

As the line moved along, guests carrying plates stacked high with sirloin, sauteed vegetables, and fried chicken, I spotted her.

She was wearing her stained apron and was clad in all black. She greeted every guest with a warm smile, as she dropped spoonfuls of vegetables on their plates. Even from this distance, I could see the exhaustion in her face, dark circles formed from the previous four nights she had worked consecutively. Although my mom was the cause of my anxiety plaguing my mind, she was also my anchor: keeping me grounded and confident in the room of such prestigious guests.

If they knew she, a waitress, was my mom, would they see me as a fraud?

The night of the fundraising dinner, my two lives clashed. To the guests, politicians, and attendees, I was the young politico with a bright future in public service; my Democratic-blue dress shirt and pants were external confirmations. But in my world, I was someone entirely different. I was the boy whose single-mother worked overtime with every opportunity she had; the boy who had worn that same apron the night before, greeting customers to ensure that there would be running water and electricity at home for the month. Until then, I had exhausted myself in preventing the two worlds from colliding.



Since being forced to confront this reality, I've learned to forge my two identities. I used to think that I couldn't be both; that somehow, hailing from a low-income, single-parent household prevented me from being a respectable leader – and human being. How could I be someone people could respect, someone others relied on, when I struggled to even make ends meet in my own home?

But separating myself into these two halves proved to be antithetical to my deeply-held values. There was no way that I could truthfully pursue knowledge, compassionately lead organizations, or even develop true bonds with my family and friends without first accepting myself entirely. I began using my own experiences to connect with those facing similar life struggles, who need empathetic leadership the most. The other half I tried so desperately to hide, in fact, I have discovered, is the half of myself that I must never lose sight of. It's what brings about tangible change and helps me lead with compassion and conviction. I shifted the energy I spent on hiding myself towards advancing my passions: leading Youth-in-Government community service projects, expanding Kentucky High School Democrats across the commonwealth, and working on campaigns for candidates that want to improve those in situations like my own.

I now step into every room completely at ease. My smile is no longer simply political – it's mine.