

BLUE JAYS, a piece for a college creative writing course:

On the day that I turned eighteen, I visited my brother. My brother's home is a small room. Dark, drab, and six-feet deep. He's lived in his constrictive abode for over a decade, for nearly thirteen years to be exact. I've always hated visiting him, from the moment he stopped living with my family. I almost resented him for leaving, and loathed the people who drove him into solitude.

Over the years, my parents would drag us to Harrison's new home. We would drop into his neighborhood whenever we were in the area, my parents determined to inspect the state of his lawn. For years, I observed from the car window as my parents communicated with him from outside of his house. The door to his home was always locked, my parents were never allowed to enter – they would simply speak with him from his well-manicured lawn.

As a child, I always assumed that Harrison would live with us again. I would live each day in denial of his departure, imagining his smiling face in the window as I returned home from school. Each day I daydreamed about his arrival, on foot, to our family home. I told myself that he would walk home, that he would return to his animal-themed, lime-green room – a room that directly juxtaposed my pink, frilly one.

While thoughts of him often occupied my mind, I never once spoke of them. When the family therapist that my mother took me to attempted to pry information about my feelings out of my heart, I refused to budge. I would play with the various dolls that sat in numerous places around a large dollhouse in the back corner of the sterile room, and speak about my days in school – not of Harrison.

Maybe it was because I didn't remember how he left us. I remember the last time that I saw him, his head swaddled in white bandages, eyes peacefully closed, the soft rise and fall of his chest. I remember my parents asking me to speak with him, to sing to him. I remember the machines. The steady heartbeat of my brother aided by boxes with wires. I remember setting my head on his chest, refusing to believe that a lack of machinery would cause him any harm. I remember hearing his small heart fade out, being escorted out of his hospital room, and nothing else. My memory goes blank for a few months following that moment, devoid of all thoughts and beliefs other than one: he will return home.

House hunting for Harrison was difficult for each member of my family. We were unsure of which neighborhood would fit his needs best, and which plot of land would have enough space for the rest of our immediate family members to build their future homes. It was a tough decision, and a permanent one.

I have been told of my first visit to Harrison's new home, it was the day that we moved him in. While I don't recall much of the move-in process, I do know that I was not allowed to see him.

My family made sure that his bed was comfortable, that he had everything he would need for a while – toys, sentimental cards, and other memorabilia adorned the innermost room of his new, wooden home. There were no furnishings, only four barren, white walls.

Shortly after settling Harrison into his final home, my first grade teacher visited me in my family home. She handed me a clay Blue Jay, mentioning how she firmly believed that each time she saw the bird, it was her brother watching over her. She wished to pass down this belief to me, assuring me that whenever I saw the blue-feathered specimen, it was a reminder that Harrison was visiting me in the best way that he could.

On the day that I entered adulthood, I decided it was time to pay Harrison a visit. I never once felt compelled to visit him on my own during the years of his separate living situation, I never once felt driven to catch up. I believed that if I never visited him it wouldn't be real; that the belief that Harrison was still with us would live on until I became Harrison's next-door neighbor in his final resting place. Throughout the years, I had seen Blue Jays here and there, oddly enough appearing in times of difficulty within my personal life. When I received the news that my first grade teacher had passed away, I witnessed two Blue Jays sit on my windowsill, and I observed as they wandered to a nearby tree, seemingly watching over me. Listening to the whispers of my shock, witnessing the tears that lined the brim of my two, deep eyes. The clay Jay, bearing coiled wires for appendages and a small planting pot for a body, sat on the bookshelf parallel to my windowsill, seemingly communicating in conjunction with its live counterparts. It wasn't until my eighteenth birthday that I was convinced of the phenomenon of visiting avifauna. I sat on a cold, granite bench near Harrison's home, speaking to him about my teenage years. Telling him of the love I had experienced, the friends made and lost. Divulging secrets, telling him about the state of mom and dad. When the tears began to run down my face and the dark clouds above mimicked the moisture, a Blue Jay flew into the tree closest to where I sat. Then another joined it. And another. Until the little willow tree was turned into a deep shade of magnificent, shining sapphire.

Common Application Essay for colleges:

Thump, thump, thump, silence.

“His heart stopped beating faster than I expected,” I said, astonished.

I glanced around the drab hospital room and felt the dense cloud of grief enshroud my family. The heavy veil settled on the shoulders of my young parents, enveloping our hearts as tears began to flood the room. I didn't just lose my younger brother that day, I lost the opportunity to have a “normal” childhood.

I had my first panic attack a few days later. I was only seven. While searching for a place to bury my best friend, nausea rolled over me in rough waves, and tears carved canals of despair into my cheeks. I didn't know what was happening to me—I only knew that something was wrong.

I found comfort in reading novels because I loved the far-away lands and characters that only existed in my mind. Literature became my escape. Each evening, I would travel to a world free of pain and loss. I soon discovered that I could create my own escape through writing; I could rewrite the ending to each story, including my own. Etching short stories and crude comics in a battered notebook served as therapy. Soon, the childhood fantasies faded, and I was forced to snap back to brutal reality: my brother had died. Even an infinite amount of imagination could not bring him back. At thirteen, I was finally old enough to process this loss, and I began to crumble. Piece by piece, moment by moment, I caved. I had trouble completing normal tasks: getting out of bed was a chore, and I struggled to eat at mealtimes. One night, I began to write about my pain, about the overwhelming rush of emotions. It was the first time that I used a journal as an outlet. I began to pour out my heart into the pages of a bright pink Moleskin journal, documenting my journey to recovery. My road to revival.

After a few years, I traded in my notebook for a pair of volleyball shoes—enveloping myself in a new hobby, a new distraction. I didn't have time to escape into literature. But when my eighth grade English teacher assigned us a personal narrative project, I rekindled my love for writing. With heavy sighs and groans, my peers seemed wholly disinterested in our task. But I sat at my desk smiling, eyes gleaming. We were assigned to write about a hero in our life. Most of my classmates chose to write about superheroes. I chose my brother.

Sifting through old photographs, I began to gather inspiration for my narrative. Tears dripping from my cheeks, inhaling sharply, I wondered if it was a good idea to reopen an old wound. Up until that point, I had done a good job convincing myself that I was alright, but seeing images of my long-lost friend began to unstitch the tightly woven knots of pain in my heart. We always revert back to our roots, to what was once comfortable. The words, and tears, poured from my heart and into my fingers. Words formed sentences; sentences formed paragraphs. I had successfully transferred my heart into words, into a story. My story.

“Hannah, I would like for you to read your piece to the class if you feel comfortable,” Mrs. Jeter said during an afternoon lesson.

Hands shaking, I gathered the strength to stand. Each step, matching the pace of my quickening heartbeat, pounded into the carpeted floor. I steadied myself on a desk, words slowly leaving my lips. Once the last word had been read, I peered over the top of my paper, glancing at my classmates. Each pair of eyes were staring at me, tears seeping through sorrowful gazes. It was at that moment I realized my words have power. I found that I could impact others through my work.

Excerpt from a college application:

As I dip my fine-tipped paintbrush into the acrylic pigment, I realize that I am in control of the image that I am creating. I am the artist of an evolving masterpiece. The colorful render is filled with light and shadows, depth and dimension. The olive hues of paint dance together, formulating a strong complexion. The canvas, weathered with character, battered by the journey of life. Each brushstroke is beautiful, each flaw breathtaking.

A piece so purposefully made.

There were several moments where, with tearful eyes, I wished to give up on my work. I wished to rid myself of the chaos and pain. I would often strip the canvas of its paint, creating a scene devoid of color. Once depicting swirls of hobbies and heaps of friendships, now blank—a complete reset. With a blank canvas and a fresh start, I would embark on new endeavors: learning to pilot and publishing my writings. I started the painting anew and felt a rush of anxiety engulf my body as I peel back the layers of paint and begin to create again.

Characters fade from the canvas, replaced by new figures. Some will remain for years to come; others were only meant to teach me new techniques and new lessons.

I have created a scene I never knew was possible. The highlights and the shadows work together to create the portrait of a woman, learning and growing with each step of her journey. Crafted from the pain and heartbreak. Conceived from darkness and hardships. Created with love, joy, and hope. The meticulous brushstrokes create a picture encapsulating my essence, capturing my journey. I curated a beautiful creation: my life.

And although she is beautiful, she is far from complete.

She is a constantly changing, Ever-evolving,
Masterpiece.