

GOOD SAMPLE PERSONAL STATEMENT

The dim lighting reflected off the peeling paint of the basement walls of the World War II era Bulgarian hospital in which I stood. Anxious parents waited patiently in line for the food which would save the lives of their young children. This was the first time I had seen Yordanka, a widow in her late fifties, at her job. She worked feverishly to distribute the food to parents who had children they couldn't afford to feed. After she had distributed the meal of the day, crushed vegetable soup and rice pudding, Yordanka greeted me with her signature toothy grin.

I met Yordanka a few weeks earlier when she enrolled in the beginner's level English class that I taught. She and I became quick friends, and I soon uncovered her passion. She had been the director of the under-funded municipally subsidized soup kitchen for infants for over twenty years and derived great satisfaction from serving the abundance of children living in poverty in the central Bulgarian city of Veliko Turnovo.

I often visited Yordanka at work. Each time I was there, she delighted in giving me a sample of the entrée of the day. She would wait expectantly for my approval, and each time as I gave it her blue eyes brightened and she would agree with me that it did have excellent flavor. During one of my visits, I found the normally cheerful Yordanka in tears. Sorrowfully, she explained that the main refrigerator had failed and there was no way to keep food cool. Through the tears she explained that they would be turning away more than half of the normal beneficiaries of the kitchen.

Immediately we began to discuss options the kitchen could explore. The most obvious was to petition the government for funds, but since the city government was on the brink of bankruptcy, that appeared unlikely to be successful. After a few minutes, I suggested the possibility of obtaining aid from abroad. We obtained applications for aid from a pair of international agencies. Yordanka completed the application packets and within a couple of days a letter arrived notifying the kitchen that funds would be made available for immediate assistance. Additionally, the organizations indicated their desire to help purchase not only a new refrigerator, but also a new freezer and industrial grade mixer to facilitate the assistance of more needy children.

Years earlier as a self-conscious thirteen-year-old, my anguish increased with each passing step as my mother leaned hard upon my shoulder. Struggling to put one foot in front of the other, she limped towards the entrance to the building which we were approaching. Just then, my worst fear became reality as we passed the girl who was my latest "crush." She looked at me with the amused smile of one who didn't understand. I resolved at that moment never to return to the seventh grade again.

Just at that moment, my mother, clearly oblivious to my embarrassment and dire social circumstances, thanked me for my understanding and for not being ashamed of her because of the difficulties which she had in walking. I was devastated and instantaneously engulfed with a different form of shame than the shame I felt in passing my "crush." This new shame was the type of shame you have when you have done something wrong and you want to hide it forever so that no one will ever discover your secret.

"No problem," I mumbled through a forced smile.

Right then I realized that multiple-sclerosis was a part of who my mother was and as a result it was a part of *my* life. It hit me for the first time that her willingness to become a mother despite of her condition had increased the rate at which her nervous system deteriorated and would eventually contribute to her shortened life. She had literally sacrificed some of her life in order that I could be born.

One year ago, my wife and I pulled into a poorly lit parking lot around 2 a.m. I had to see where it happened. The emergency crews had already removed the remains of what had once been my 18 year-old brother's Ford Escort. Not surprisingly, there were no skid marks, but the point of collision was obvious. The black paint from the car's bumper had rubbed off generously onto the cement retaining wall and a combination of engine fluids and blood marked the ground where the car had come to a sudden stop.

Earlier that night, my brother Josh, who had long suffered from bi-polar disorder, had become so desperate that he had resorted to suicide to end his problems. His method was to drive his car as fast as he could through an abandoned parking lot and collide at high speed with the cement retaining wall that separated the parking lot from the businesses on its east.

When I heard the news, my heart ached with sorrow for my younger brother who felt so discouraged that he felt his only escape was death. My mind raced, searching for answers to the unanswerable questions that filled my thoughts.

The half-hour between the time that we arrived at the trauma center and the time that the medical helicopter arrived carrying Josh was undisputedly the longest of my life. When Josh finally arrived and was stabilized, we were invited back into the surgery room to see him for a few moments before he began the first of several reconstructive surgeries. Through the blood running down his face, Josh was sobbing. He told us he loved us and that he was sorry. After staying in the hospital for several weeks, he was transferred to the psychiatric unit. After receiving the help he needed from caring professionals, Josh became the same Josh I had known as a childhood playmate. He became someone who is caring and funny and not the sarcastic and depressed individual he had become over the past several years.

There are struggles in life that individuals do not have the power to overcome by themselves. Yordanka couldn't afford to buy a new refrigerator on her own, my mother couldn't walk without support and Josh was unable to overcome his depression without assistance. But individuals and groups who had the power to help these three people stepped in, thus making their lives better. By obtaining a legal education, I believe I will be put into a position from which I can lift others up and help them to overcome the seemingly unconquerable problems that they face.