**ESSAY #1: Opportunity from Misfortune**

Directions: Read the student essay below carefully. With a pen or pencil, underline or circle key words/phrases that stand out to you. In the right-hand column discuss why the various words/phrases stood out to you (what they made you think or feel, etc.). When you are done, make a few notes. What do we learn about this applicant?

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| As my seventh-grade classmates ventured into the life of Harry Potter, I was left with the *Three Little Pigs.* I learned to read English when I was 12.  For the second time.  A car accident knocked me off the football and baseball fields into a coma and a four-month hospital stay.   I lost my native language to the disorder of aphasia.   I survived a severe traumatic brain injury.  I cannot, however, stand and boldly wish it had not happened, for the experience, as awful as it may sound, was essential to my persona today.  Will, dedication, persistence, all of which instantly became a daily struggle, are now a second sense to me; a gift that would have lain silent without the opportunity from misfortune.  Therefore, this is no sob story.  It is a story of personal triumph over adversity.  Life was daunting.  For the first five nights after the car accident, I had to wrestle with death.  The pressure in my brain was astronomical.  It was as though Mars was ripping me open.  I was given enough morphine to bring down a horse. As the coma began to wane and I started to regain consciousness, but my feeble voice was only able to say “hi.”  The entire week, the only word I could manage was a faint “hi.”  My parents and doctors were amazed at the accomplishment: a simple “hi.”  Soon, I was moved to the National Rehabilitation Hospital to begin intense therapy, physical, occupational, and speech.  I thought physical and occupational therapy would be easy.  It was far from it.  Even walking for a mere two minutes required a half hour nap.  As the days progressed though, my memory of the recent physical successes pushed me to trudge on through a tunnel of misery.  At last, the light at the end was visible.   Speech, English to be specific, was not as easy to relearn.   I remember the first day of hospital school; I could not even spell the word “dog.”  So, a paragraph, let alone an essay, was definitely out of the question.  I also lost the ability to read.  We memorize words and our brain organizes them as we read to comprehend the meaning.  My memorized words were messed up, so reading for me, was a guessing game. I could not differentiate between the words “it,” “was,” “there,” “someone,” etc..  I could sound longer words out, but the simple words were confusing.  Frustration was eminent, but its force was not strong enough to take down my persistent will. The National Rehabilitation Hospital solved the mystery of the full extent of my mental injury, but I left with a devastating order:  any sport or activity with the involvement of contact was prohibited, including my beloved sports, baseball and football. Forever.   Then, just like a virus-filled computer is sent to Microsoft to be debugged, I was sent to Kennedy Krieger Institute for three months.  At the new institution, therapists helped me relearn scholarly arts.  Six hours a day, five times a week, I anguished under the mental pain to relearn.  I soon devised tricks to help compensate for my injury.  I used my hands to give queues to speak.  I learned to focus on each and every word while reading.  Soon, I started to be able to speak in a full sentence, write a paragraph (with severe grammatical mistakes of course, can’t have it all), and I was able to read again.  Four months after the accident, I returned to school.  I got straight “A”s for the next three years and was admitted to the advanced scholar program.  Lastly, after two years, I was back on the baseball and football fields with my doctor’s blessing.  My struggle still exists, but the experience added valued traits to my now rounded personality.  I am respected for my work ethic in school and sports.  I even won the Sportsmanship award for my efforts.  The path was rough and dark, and I may have had a few moments of faithlessness along the way, but it got brighter.   The talent of work and commitment sparked the light, and I will never let it burn out.  *“Adversity has the effect of eliciting talents which in prosperous circumstances would have lain dormant.”   Ironically, this quote by the famous Roman poet Horace turned up as an essay prompt on my AP Language Exam.* |  |

**ESSAY #2: The March**

Directions: Read the student essay below carefully. With a pen or pencil, underline or circle key words/phrases that stand out to you. In the right-hand column discuss why the various words/phrases stood out to you (what they made you think or feel, etc.). When you are done, make a few notes. What do we learn about this applicant?

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| *“Maryland!” It was at this point that I realized something. I was usually in the honking car. I was usually the person who would be giving weird looks to the protesters. But not today. Today I was taking a stand, participating, making a change. I was fighting for a cause that affects me. I was fighting for a cause that I am passionate about.*  We rounded the street corner and slowed to a stop outside of the park. I remembered coming here in middle school on family bike rides. My mom would lead us, and my siblings and I would follow. It was always serene. Birds would be chirping; you could hear the occasional engine of the cars driving by on an early Sunday morning, and the conversations of the people walking down the road into the heart of Bethesda. It was a time to relax. We brought blankets from home, ate picnics, and played on the playground equipment.  However, on this cold November day, the park was completely the opposite. People were everywhere. They were loud, and looked and smelled like they hadn’t showered in days. People were standing on top of gazebos; waving banners, signs and flags. Some were older and had canes, others were still very young children, some had no shoes on, and many were still in Halloween costumes from festivities the night before.  I got out of the car and waved bye to my dad, and he drove away. At first, I was extremely uncomfortable. None of my friends were here yet. Of course I was early. For my family, early is on time and on time is late. I unconsciously fidgeted with my hands, checked my phone every three seconds, and didn’t make eye contact with any of the other people. It felt like the longest ten minutes of my life.  Finally, people I knew started to slowly trickle in. Sam had told us about the Great March for Climate Action about a month before in Environmental Club. I had looked at my friend Sarah, and through the raising of eyebrows and shrugging of shoulders we silently made a deal to do the march only if the other was doing it too. Now it was actually here.  The Great March for Climate Action was on its final stretch. After starting in California eight months and about three thousand miles prior to today, the marchers were only ten miles away from their goal, our nation’s capital.  We were walking in the streets. Marchers were banging drums made from cardboard and plastic wrap, playing guitars and ukuleles, chanting with bullhorns. We were stopping traffic, and getting honked at by frustrated and enraged Bethesda drivers.  Once we got to the Maryland- DC border we stopped suddenly in the middle of a busy city sidewalk.  “California! Arizona! New Mexico!” The thirty-five full time marchers began chanting all the states that they had marched through, and were soon joined by many people in the crowd. They were remembering the journey that had led up to these final moments.  “Colorado! Nebraska! Iowa!” They were recognizing the sacrifices the marchers had made for their mission. Some people dropped out of college or quit their jobs.  “Illinois! Indiana! Ohio! Pennsylvania!” All of this in order to communicate to the government, citizens of the US, and the world that we need to do something about the climate crisis.  “Maryland!” One of the marchers passed me a bullhorn.  “Washington DC!” It was almost as if she had passed me my voice.  “Show me what democracy looks like!” I yelled to the group, smiling.  *Many months after the march, I won the teacher nominated Chatham College Rachel Carson Book Award for my excellence in Science and English and concern for the environment. This march helped me see what I can achieve and see how I can make a difference, no matter how small the change.* |  |

**ESSAY #3: Learning from Failure**

Directions: Read the student essay below carefully. With a pen or pencil, underline or circle key words/phrases that stand out to you. In the right-hand column discuss why the various words/phrases stood out to you (what they made you think or feel, etc.). When you are done, make a few notes. What do we learn about this applicant?

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| For as long as I can remember, putting on a pair of dance shoes was natural. Walking into the gym to try out for my school’s highly competitive Poms dance team, I was determined to take my lessons from the past two years and correctly execute them. This was year three of trying out in front of the same judges, teammates and coach.  Junior year, I decided to dedicate myself even more to dance. Although I missed out on countless social activities, I promised myself once I made Poms, it would all be worth it. Smiling and sashaying into the gym, I felt confident. Jumping and spinning while correctly executing the choreography only made me feel more at ease about my placement on the team. Leaving the gymnasium with a genuine smile, I was thrilled when my peers asked me how my routine went.  As the night wore on, and I waited for the callback, I tried to stay positive. But as the hours passed, I stopped looking at my phone and laid motionless next to it on my bed, hoping for the call. Unlike freshman year, this time there would be no communication if we didn’t make the team. The coach told us she would begin to call the accepted girls at eight pm, so the only picture I could imagine was hearing my phone ring and being thrilled with my newest accomplishment. By nine I came to the realization that I was not going to receive the news I had been hoping for. No email, no phone call, silence.  Having experienced rejection multiple times with Poms tryouts, I now take on the responsibility to assist my friends when they too are reeling from defeat. My defeats forced me to look at what really mattered. I have come to believe success is based on your own standards and no one else's. I am well aware I will face rejection in the future, yet now I know how to handle it with acceptance and grace. According to Winston Churchill, “success is not final, failure is not fatal: it is the courage to continue that counts.” Over time my goals have shifted from vying to be a member of the dance team to dancing simply because it makes me happy.  This experience has given me the courage to propel forward and pursue what I desire even if at times it may appear unattainable. I am resilient. Following my third tryout, I continued to take dance lessons weekly, practicing the same steps and technique that have experienced highs and lows. Not being on the Poms team, has opened new doors that I would not have experienced otherwise. Due to the hours of dance classes, I now know how to balance extracurricular activities with academics. This is a skill I will carry with me throughout my life. Although people ask me why I still dance, my commitment to the activity is stronger than any hurdle. The journey of my tryout was more important than a placement on the team.  A year later, hair pulled back in a gelled ponytail wearing a black leotard, grey jazz pants, and worn dance shoes, I dance. I smile while executing triple pirouettes, so even the last row can see my confidence. |  |

**ESSAY #4: A Legacy**

Directions: Read the student essay below carefully. With a pen or pencil, underline or circle key words/phrases that stand out to you. In the right-hand column discuss why the various words/phrases stood out to you (what they made you think or feel, etc.). When you are done, make a few notes. What do we learn about this applicant?

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| I have a dusty bookshelf in my bedroom that houses the neatly arranged medals and trophies I have collected over the past ten years. I have awards dating back to early 2006. But the O’Kelly legacy extends far before me. My mother was a diver at UVA and she became my inspiration and one of my first coaches. She put me on the Glenwood dive team when I was a shrimpy seven-year-old, and since then I have competed in nine divisional meets, eight all-star meets, and broken four pool records. But it wasn't until the age of 15 that I discovered my favorite aspect of diving: coaching. When I turned 15, I landed my first job as an assistant coach. I looked forward to putting my skills to use and sharing my knowledge.  I found particular interest in a five-year-old named Cady Emerson. She was one of the youngest kids on the team, and on her first day, she showed up in a green bathing suit with a glittery purple tiger stenciled on the front. She was about half the size of everyone else. She wasn’t one of the kids that caught my head coach’s eye, but I noticed she picked up things very quickly. And I have always been one to root for the underdog. I made sure that I was her primary coach and I poured a lot of extra time and energy into teaching her new things. I taught her a front dive, back dive, front flip, and an inward dive. It was a long, bumpy road, but to this day she is at the top of her age category and doing extremely well. In her last meet of the season as an eight-and-under, she absolutely rose to the occasion. I was so excited to see how she did that I peeked at the scoresheets. I knew she had won before she did. I wanted to tell her, but I didn’t want to take anything away from her big moment. At halftime, after she stepped up to accept her blue ribbon, I jumped up, sprinted over, and gave her a huge hug.  Diving doesn’t come as easily to everyone as it did to Cady. Every day I work with kids where it is much more difficult to encourage them to try new things. Diving is all about mental toughness, and sometimes children are scared to take the next step. I, for one, can relate. I was terrified to learn a 1 ½ somersault dive when I was younger. Learning new things can be terrifying, and it takes someone with the right mindset, like my mom, to instill confidence in a young diver.  I was working with a nine-year-old named Madeline for the entire summer on just one skill—a back dive. New divers tend to have difficulty learning a back dive because it is a blind dive. Madeline could easily do a back dive with me spotting her, but when it came to doing one by herself, she was nervous. My patience and support as her coach helped her finally pull off her back dive at the last meet of the season.  Bill Bowerman, a former USA Olympic track and field coach, once said, "Victory is in having done your best. If you've done your best, you've won." Even though Madeline didn’t win an award, her performance in her last meet of the season was just as big of an accomplishment as Cady taking home the blue ribbon. She had overcome her fear.  Coaching is all about selflessness. I have learned to take my experiences and expertise and pass my knowledge on to young divers. I put my diving on the back burner to focus on coaching. By season’s end, I was able to do for others what my mother did for me. Legacy isn’t about personal medals. Often it is about paying it forward. |  |

**ESSAY #5: Star-Crossed Lovers**

Directions: Read the student essay below carefully. With a pen or pencil, underline or circle key words/phrases that stand out to you. In the right-hand column discuss why the various words/phrases stood out to you (what they made you think or feel, etc.). When you are done, make a few notes. What do we learn about this applicant?

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| **Prompt:** *Johns Hopkins University was founded in 1876 on a spirit of exploration and discovery. As a result, students can pursue a multi-dimensional undergraduate experience both in and outside of the classroom. Given the opportunities at Hopkins, please discuss your current interests—academic or extracurricular pursuits, personal passions, summer experiences, etc.—and how you will build upon them here.*      **Star-Crossed Lovers**  UrbanDictionary defines a love triangle as a situation "When two people both love a third, and that third loves them both. He/she may be conflicted as to whom he/she wants, and generally nobody emerges happy." Typically, love triangles arise within cliche drama shows where the star quarterback and the bad-boy fight over the girl who can't make up her mind. But in my case, it's two subjects battling over my undying love and affection.  The love story of science and me began one stormy night, when the browse selection on Netflix was my only companion. After my indecisiveness eroded, I finally decided to start a new TV series, one about a group of successful surgeons dealing with their everyday lives while saving other people's lives: Grey's Anatomy. The infatuation developed instantly; from the beginning, there was chemistry. Our bond grew stronger with each and every passing season and by the ninth one, I knew it was true love. I dedicated a piece of my heart, and more importantly, my future, to science and medicine that day. So I signed up for AP Biology, AP Chemistry, and anatomy, joined the National Science Honors Society and the National Medical Honors Society, created the Pre-Med Club as its acting president, and spent my Summer at Sibley's Memorial Hospital-Johns Hopkins Medicine in the ER and post-operational ward; I mapped out our entire future together. It seemed like I had finally found my happily ever after until another caught my brain: Math.  Math and I had a very different romance. We started off rocky, in AB Calculus junior year. We didn't get along at all and struggled to maintain civil, at times I really I hated it. But everything changed May 7th, 2014 when I took the AP exam. It was fireworks, sparks flying, a function finding its inverse, a derivative finding its integral. The exam showed me a possibility of something real between Math and me, and the AP Score results in July confirmed that assumption. I decided not to terminate the relationship after all, to pursue it and see where it may lead. So I joined the math team, signed up for BC Calculus, and decided to intern for my calculus teacher for AB-Calculus my senior year. I'm still exploring this affair, but right now the connection feels strong.  UrbanDictionary was right; generally, nobody emerges from love triangles happy. Constricted by core curriculums and the pressure to choose just one, all three parties were bound to end up unhappy. The complex relationship I hold with both pieces of my heart and future continuously pull me in both directions; I just can't seem to chose. This love triangle belongs somewhere where it will be nurtured, accepted, and even encouraged. In the right hands, specifically, in Hopkins helping hands, with its lack of a core curriculum, individualized study, Woodrow Wilson research opportunity, and diverse student organizations, this love triangle seemingly destined for disaster will soon be transformed into the ultimate triple threat. |  |

**ESSAY #6: Buddhists Monks Can be Iron Man Fans Too**

Directions: Read the student essay below carefully. With a pen or pencil, underline or circle key words/phrases that stand out to you. In the right-hand column discuss why the various words/phrases stood out to you (what they made you think or feel, etc.). When you are done, make a few notes. What do we learn about this applicant?

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| **DIVERSITY: As Georgetown is a diverse community, the Admissions Committee would like to know more about you in your own words. Please submit a brief essay, either personal or creative, which you feel best describes you.**         While visiting a Buddhist temple with my Unitarian Universalist church, I struck up a conversation with a monk strolling around and, out of the blue, he asks, “How’d you like the new Iron Man movie?” “Umm, I really liked Robert Downey Jr.’s acting,” I stammered with surprise. It turns out he’s a pretty big Avengers fan who also arranges sugary peeps to reenact famous historical events. I was taken aback, since I had previously thought that Buddhist monks were secluded from all of modern society and culture, but a firsthand lesson taught me to dispel those generalizations.         Unitarian Universalism’s roots trace back to Henry David Thoreau, a devout transcendentalist. In his day, he was greatly despised for his controversial beliefs. He argued against industrialism and social conformity. As a Harvard scholar, he wrote many publications against slavery, war, and colonialism. Although his critics called him a crazy anarchist, he laid the groundwork for Unitarian Universalism which celebrates acceptance, diversity, and love.  The first thing that many say when they hear I’m a Unitarian Universalist is, “That sounds like a cult” and the first Google search suggestion is “Is Unitarian Universalism a cult?” However, when my family was searching for a strong sense of community that offered a safe, comforting environment for my brother and me, the UU community we found was no cult at all, but rather a faith embodied by a loving congregation called Cedar Lane Unitarian Universalist Church. You may have seen us in the news as the only church to have a gay white minister with five black adopted kids, or inducting a Hindu physicist with a degree in quantum mechanics as our senior minister. There were myriad reasons why I grew to adore the Cedar Lane congregation. What I love most about Cedar Lane was its bravery to be different. The youth are encouraged to question and challenge ideas that seem infallible, letting our young minds wander freely. To most of the world, it’s strange to include such unorthodox practices such as sex education, and maybe this is why we’re called a cult. But to me, Cedar Lane isn't strange at all; I’ve always found Cedar Lane fitting since I often find myself questioning the integrity and legitimacy of authority, whether in school, online, or among my peers. Also, I admire the coordination and cooperation of the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee (UUSC), which is devoted to promoting worldwide social justice and human rights.  During my ninth grade “pilgrimage” field trip to Boston where my faith blossomed, I was visiting the headquarters of the UUSC, and what I expected would be a mundane, humdrum office. But, when I stepped through the door, I saw an eclectic workspace filled with an effervescent aura. I witnessed men and women, Muslims and Christians hunched over computers collaborating to make the world a better place, people of a multitude of cultures working together on projects that ranged from providing clean water to rural areas in the Midwest to preventing African warlords from burning people alive in tires, were in this one office. The UU faith had united them to make a universal difference. On the same trip, I visited Walden Pond, where Thoreau had secluded himself from society in order to connect with nature, and as I sat in his one room cabin, I wondered how, from that exact location, Thoreau was able to advance the national parks movement, civil rights, the hippie revolution, and environmentalism. And then it hit me; only once surrounded by the simplicity and serene beauty of nature was he able to see the flaws in our complex society.         Every Sunday of my fifth-grade religious education, Cedar Lane enlightened me of every culture and religion. We visited Jewish synagogues, Hindu mandirs, Muslim mosques, Christian churches, Buddhist temples, and Sikh gurdwaras. We studied the origins and sang hymns of each faith. We learned about every faith and incorporated beautiful aspects of each of their cultures to create a beautiful, loving environment. Valuable teachings like this prevented me from being that ignorant kid in school that points to a Sikh’s dastar and laughs. Cedar Lane’s teachings of love and respect showed me how to socialize with everyone, despite culture, race, learning disability, or age. |  |

**Essay #7: A True Friend**

Directions: Read the student essay below carefully. With a pen or pencil, underline or circle key words/phrases that stand out to you. In the right-hand column discuss why the various words/phrases stood out to you (what they made you think or feel, etc.). When you are done, make a few notes. What do we learn about this applicant?

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| *People were murmuring to her in Romanian as I walked up the stairs. She hugged me but I knew she didn't recognize me at first.  Then, I saw her eyes start to water.*  *“Ana Maria?”*  *“Yes,” I replied.  She embraced me in a hug, and quickly took my hand and showed me to a room surrounded by red couches. Then I recognized her: she was the red-headed lady from the video. I was finally standing in the room I had been in 13 years ago…*  Every year, on the anniversary of my family becoming a family, I watch the video of my four-year-old self in a room with a red-haired lady, surrounded by red couches and toys covering the grey carpet and sit amazed that I spoke a different language at one point in my life---one I no longer speak.  In 2003 all international adoptions from Romania closed.  Only because of the help of Azota, our adoption was one of the last ones to sneak through. So, my sister and I did not meet our parents until we were four; we were in an orphanage as infants and toddlers, before being placed in a foster home. Now, every May 18th, we watch the video of us leaving Romania. Pigtails swinging from side to side, we walk hand in hand. We pass two women sitting outside of the flower shop where we pick out a bouquet of lilies for our new mother. We wave and say, “Goodbye, we are going to America,” in thick accented voices. Our faces glow and our eyes sparkle as we walk down the pebble-lined street, step by step, getting closer and closer to the place we will finally call home.    I always knew I wanted to give back, so during the summer before my senior year, my mother and I planned a service trip. When I returned, Azota told me that I had the same smile and cheeks. She kept pinching them and I felt like the same four year-old. We took several pictures together, and I noticed that she always held both of my hands in the photos. She must have sensed my curiosity. She explained, “a true friend grabs your hand, and touches your heart.”  It was a busy trip. We sorted donations and made care packages for the kids. We visited several orphanages. I played soccer with the kids and showed them tricks. I let the little girls braid my hair, pull on the roots, and tie it in knots. It hurt and I wanted to tell them to stop, but I refrained from saying anything when I caught a glimpse of one girl infatuated by my long black hair. These children yearned for attention. As we drove up to each orphanage, kids ran with our car. Not accustomed to visitors, they seemed to question why we were there, but when we smiled and waved, their faces lit up and they grinned from ear to ear, and within minutes, we were best friends. One day, I met a boy my age who did not get adopted before the law changed. Watching him greet me with a smile, despite his daily challenges, makes me appreciate even more what Azota made possible for me.  By the end of the trip I didn't want to leave. In fact, since my return, my friends and I have discussed how incomplete we feel. We are not needed here like we were in Romania. I am now working at my high school to gather donations to send to an orphanage in Romania. And, recently, I volunteered at a dinner for foster parents. That night, I stood hand and hand with a child, her little fingers barely fit into my palm. As she clung onto my hand, I thought about what Azota said to me, “ A true friend grabs your hand, and touches your heart.” |  |

**Final Thoughts:**

**1. After reading all the essays, which stand out to you most and why?**

**2. Do any of the student essays inspire you to tell a personal story? Explain.**