

## Personal Narrative Essay

For this essay, you will use your analytical skills to look carefully at a specific experience you have had and explore its meaning, specifically focusing on what this experience has made you realize about yourself or your place in society or in the world.

You will write a 2-4-page essay that describes, analyzes, and reflects on a personal experience. You need to . . .

- Use the first person “I” effectively
- Choose a **limited and specific experience** or conversation that can be developed and analyzed thoughtfully in only a few pages. Do not write an entire autobiography of your life!
- **Describe** this experience vividly so that readers can understand what happened and will care about what you have to say about it. In reflecting on the particular experience, show your readers what it has taught you.
- **Analyze** the experience and consider what it might imply about how people in our society behave toward one another, what they value, and what assumptions or stereotypes they may hold consciously or unconsciously.
- Convey the importance of this experience and the idea(s) you took away from it by **reflecting** and **focusing** primarily on what this experience has taught you about your social identity (how you are seen in and valued in society), and not just your individual identity (personality, likes/dislikes, etc.). This focus on social identity allows you to express a meaning in this assignment that is relevant socially (to your readers, for example) and not just to you personally.

A rubric containing the evaluation criteria will be provided. Be sure to use appropriate sentence structure, word choice, grammar, spelling, and punctuation that enables rather than hinders clear and effective communication. Appropriate format: 1-inch margins all around/double-spaced Times New Roman 12pt font.

## Repressed

I stand at the glass door, heart pounding, nausea settling in. It's an average Sunday afternoon: brunch with my paternal side of the family. The rest of my family has already entered my grandparents' baby blue paneled home. I stay back though; walking in is always the hardest part. Once I get back to the dining room, past the front bedrooms and office, I can breath, or can I? It's time to say hello to everyone, but the thought of it causes my stomach to drop. We're an incredibly loving family, meaning that when we come and go, we hug. We all hug. The warm embrace of your loved ones can be incredibly comforting to most, but not here. Not with this family. I make my rounds, hugging by grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins...oh god. He hugs me, his long arms wrap around me pulling me close. I can feel his breath go down from the top of my head to my neck as he lays his head on my shoulder to say hello as his thumb runs down my spine. The hug itself only lasts a handful of seconds, but it feels like a lifetime. "I gotta get away. Now." I think to myself. I pull away and give a shy smile while my eyes scan the room searching for my dad. He's my saving grace; he'll be able to protect me. I don't know what I need protecting from, I just know that I need it. We lock eyes. He can read my mind; he knows I'm anxious and uncomfortable, but he doesn't ask why. Even if he were to ask why, I wouldn't know how to answer. I don't know why I feel this way, I just know that I do. I always do. Everytime I see this side of the family or am in this house, my throat tightens, my heart pounds, my soul sinks. But why? Who knows. Maybe everybody feels this way, or maybe it's just me.

I know it bothers my dad that I stray away from his side of the family. He'd never say it, but he doesn't need to. I hate that I feel this way towards them, which ultimately causes me to be distant and cold towards them, but I can't help. My gut always tells me to stay away, but I can't

just stay away from my family, especially since I don't even know why my gut is telling me this. I've felt this way for as long as I can remember. It took ten years for the repressed memories to resurface and give me clarity as to why these feelings emerge and consume me. I had been sexually molested by my oldest cousin when I was eight.

It is often believed that repressed memories cannot affect an individual without the individual remembering the details of the traumatic event, but that is not the case. I've always felt uncomfortable with intense feelings of anxiety when around my family and in this home, but it was always ignored. I couldn't explain why I felt the way I did, so why did it matter that I did? Who'd listen to a child anyways? I would express how strongly I didn't want to go to my grandparents or have sleepovers there, but it never changed anything. Not because my parents ignored me or didn't care, but because they just didn't know any better. How were they supposed to know this happened to me when I didn't even know myself?

Who knew five minutes of my life back when I was seven could really shape the person I am today? Today's society has taught girls that a sexual assault isn't an uncommon thing and is something you have to just move on from, but it's not. It's not something that can easily be overcome. It is something that shapes your character and sets up future relationships and feelings for the rest of your life. The fear and lack of control I felt as I layed in bed, my body wound in a soft green woven quilt so that I couldn't move, festered inside of me to become a normal daily feeling of mine. It became my constant fight of anxiety, depression, and anorexia. Learning, as he pulled my skirt off and began to touch me, that my body isn't mine, grew into my constant lack of self respect. The way he looked up at me while his bony face was in between my thin thighs as he laughed at me became my body dysmorphia. Being assaulted behind a

closed door while the rest of my extended family was outside the door became my feelings of loneliness, even when I'm not alone. Being told that it was just a game, that no one would believe me because I'm a girl, transformed into my silence and being unable to stand up for myself. Growing up in a society that blamed sexual assaults and rapes on the victims sprouted my constant need to apologize and take the blame for everything bad that happens.

Because the memories resurfaced during the Me Too Movement, my story along with many others are scrutinized and not believed. How convenient that I would remember such a traumatic event at such a revolutionary time for women's right. I know I'm not the only one that feels this way. These memories have always been around, though. I just never believed that something was off with them. Subconsciously, I removed the bad memories from that day, and slowly over time, they resurfaced, until one day, they had stitched themselves together to become the traumatic event that once occurred. My sexual assault wasn't just a sexual assault, it shaped me. It turned me into who I am today. No sexual assault is just that, even though society teaches otherwise. The resurfacing of these memories took a weight off of my chest; it became my clarity as to why I am the way I am. I am still silent about what happened, but I wouldn't change the past events. These repressed memories taught me to listen to my instincts, to listen to my gut. I cannot change what happened during that innocent game of hide-and-seek, but I can and do continue to grow from it.