

Common Application Prompt 2. The lessons we take from obstacles we encounter can be fundamental to later success. Recount a time when you faced a challenge, setback, or failure. How did it affect you, and what did you learn from the experience?

“Go to the skate park,” I hear my mom bark over the rattling of my skateboard.

I mention that I need to study for my chemistry test.

“Then go study!” She quickly counters.

I don’t hear her; I am already back to the trick. Skating is still my escape from the stress of school but I no longer frequent the skate parks like I once did. Everyone there still strives for first place in upcoming contests while debasing any possible competition. I don’t need to be there anymore, not since I chose to skate for pleasure over recognition.

I fall repeatedly, painting red abrasions across the canvas of my hands. I reposition my skateboard, but fail again. I shut my eyes, take a deep breath, and reattempt the trick, only to tumble onto the pavement. I throw my board across the driveway, and drop to the ground, contemplating the desperation that washes over me. Through the pain and building discouragement, I sense the specter of defeat looming. Most children attend school, participate in team sports, and spend time with family, but all I did was skateboard. Rising to the top of my sport meant falling behind in school and isolation from my peers. My one connection was with my brother who lived a similar lifestyle.

When high school began, I joined the International Baccalaureate program under the vague assumption that something might exist beyond skateboarding. I expected positive results from this decision, but my lack of work ethic and inability to handle the mounting pressure left me with a résumé of discipline referrals. I was discouraged, as I am now, slumped in the blazing sun. I recall turning to my friends for support, only to realize that most were either drug dealers or incarcerated. Now, as I sit in my seemingly abysmal driveway, I feel a crushing loneliness.

I cover my face with my beaten hands and in the blackness I think of my brother. He skateboarded everyday, but never moved past the harsh competition and delinquent friends. I vividly remember the police interrogation where I had to choose between the truth and protecting him. My decision sent my brother away on a five-year prison sentence. I pull my hands from my face and stare at them, questioning as I so often do, whether I did the right thing. I think of my current situation, acknowledging the parallels between my brother and myself. A pang of fear stabs at me as I wonder if I will end up like him.

I stand up, grab my skateboard, and focus my ambitions. This is not just a new trick now but a hurdle, symbolic of all that I have accomplished as well as all that is ahead of me. A subtle change in the technique, and the next attempt is better. I now see my goal within reach.

After the incident with my brother I gained clarity and a drive to make something more of myself. Curiosity about new skating tricks was channeled into scientific passion: volunteering at the local hospital and performing science research. I constructed strong, lasting friendships and cultivated a sense of safety and belonging. I refined my work ethic and cultured ambition. Most importantly, I felt a sense of triumph over my troublesome past.

Sunset is approaching and I focus for one last attempt at the trick. With one swift movement, I lift off the ground, slide my foot across the grip, and flip the board. I watch the skateboard spiral, each turn a milestone, and when the top of the board is in sight, I align my feet and land the trick. An unfamiliar yet pleasant feeling manifests within me. I step off my skateboard and take a deep breath. My driveway is silent, there are no crowds, no cheers, but my swelling pride is more than enough to propel me forward.

