

Sample Scholarship Essay

“If you can’t live off of it, it is useless.” My parents were talking about ice skating: my passion. I started skating as a ten-year-old in Spain, admiring how difficulty and grace intertwine to create beautiful programs, but no one imagined I would still be on the ice seven years and one country later. Even more unimaginable was the thought that ice skating might become one of the most useful parts of my life.

I was born in Mexico to two Spanish speakers; thus, Spanish was my first language. We then moved to Spain when I was six, before finally arriving in California around my thirteenth birthday. Each change introduced countless challenges, but the hardest part of moving to America, for me, was learning English. Laminated index cards, color-coded and full of vocabulary, became part of my daily life. As someone who loves to engage in a conversation, it was very hard to feel as if my tongue was cut off. Only at the ice rink could I be myself; the feeling of the cold rink breeze embracing me, the ripping sound of blades touching the ice, even the occasional ice burning my skin as I fell—these were my few constants. I did not need to worry about mispronouncing “axel” as “aksal.” Rather, I just needed to glide and deliver the jump.

From its good-natured bruise-counting competitions to its culture of hard work and perseverance, ice skating provided the nurturing environment that made my other challenges worthwhile. Knowing that each moment on the ice represented a financial sacrifice for my family, I cherished every second I got. Often this meant waking up every morning at 4 a.m. to practice what I had learned in my few precious minutes of coaching. It meant assisting in group lessons to earn extra skating time and taking my conditioning off-ice by joining my high school varsity running teams. Even as I began to make friends and lose my fear of speaking, the rink was my sanctuary. Eventually, however, the only way to keep improving was to pay for more coaching, which my family could not afford. And so I started tutoring Spanish.

Now, the biggest passion of my life is supported by my most natural ability. I have had over thirty Spanish students, ranging in age from three to forty and spanning many ethnic backgrounds. I currently work with fifteen students each week, each with different needs and ways of learning. Drawing on my own experiences as both a second language-learner and a figure skater, I assign personal, interactive exercises, make jokes to keep my students’ mindset positive, and never give away right answers. When I first started learning my axel jump, my coach told me I would have to fall at least 500 times (about a year of falls!) in order to land it. Likewise, I have my students embrace every detail of a mistake until they can begin to recognize new errors when they see them. I encourage them to expand their horizons and take pride in preparing them for new interactions and opportunities.

Although I agree that I will never live off of ice skating, the education and skills I have gained from it have opened countless doors. Ice skating has given me the resilience, work ethic, and inspiration to develop as a teacher and an English speaker. It has

improved my academic performance by teaching me rhythm, health, and routine. It also reminds me that a passion does not have to produce money in order for it to hold immense value. Ceramics, for instance, challenges me to experiment with the messy and unexpected. While painting reminds me to be adventurous and patient with my forms of self-expression. I don't know yet what I will live off of from day to day as I mature; however, the skills my passions have provided me are life-long and irreplaceable.