

## Essay #1

Managing to break free from my mother's grasp, I charged. With arms flailing and chubby legs fluttering beneath me, I was the ferocious two year old rampaging through Costco on a Saturday morning. My mother's eyes widened in horror as I jettisoned my churro; the cinnamon-sugar rocket gracefully sliced its way through the air while I continued my spree. I sprinted through the aisles, looking up in awe at the massive bulk products that towered over me. Overcome with wonder, I wanted to touch and taste, to stick my head into industrial-sized freezers, to explore every crevice. I was a conquistador, but rather than searching the land for El Dorado, I scoured aisles for free samples. Before inevitably being whisked away into a shopping cart, I scaled a mountain of plush toys and surveyed the expanse that lay before me: the kingdom of Costco.

Notorious for its oversized portions and dollar-fifty hot dog combo, Costco is the apex of consumerism. From the days spent being toted around in a shopping cart to when I was finally tall enough to reach lofty sample trays, Costco has endured a steady presence throughout my life. As a veteran Costco shopper, I navigate the aisles of foodstuffs, thrusting the majority of my weight upon a generously filled shopping cart whose enormity juxtaposes my small frame. Over time, I've developed a habit of observing fellow patrons tote their carts piled with frozen burritos, cheese puffs, tubs of ice cream, and weight-loss supplements. Perusing the aisles gave me time to ponder. Who needs three pounds of sour cream? Was cultured yogurt any more well-mannered than its uncultured counterpart? Costco gave birth to my unfettered curiosity.

While enjoying an obligatory hot dog, I did not find myself thinking about the 'all beef' goodness that Costco boasted. I instead considered finitudes and infinitudes, unimagined uses for tubs of sour cream, the projectile motion of said tub when launched from an eighty foot shelf or maybe when pushed from a speedy cart by a scrawny seventeen year old. I contemplated the philosophical: If there exists a thirtythree ounce jar of Nutella, do we really have free will? I experienced a harsh physics lesson while observing a shopper who had no evident familiarity of inertia's workings. With a cart filled to overflowing, she made her way towards the sloped exit, continuing to push and push while steadily losing control until the cart escaped her and went crashing into a concrete column, 52" plasma screen TV and all. Purchasing the yuletide hickory smoked ham inevitably led to a conversation between my father and me about Andrew Jackson's controversiality. There was no questioning Old Hickory's dedication; he was

steadfast in his beliefs and pursuits - qualities I am compelled to admire, yet his morals were crooked. We both found the ham to be more likeable-and tender.

I adopted my exploratory skills, fine tuned by Costco, towards my intellectual endeavors. Just as I sampled buffalo-chicken dip or chocolate truffles, I probed the realms of history, dance and biology, all in pursuit of the ideal cart-one overflowing with theoretical situations and notions both silly and serious. I sampled calculus, cross-country running, scientific research, all of which are now household favorites. With cart in hand, I do what scares me; I absorb the warehouse that is the world. Whether it be through attempting aerial yoga, learning how to chart blackbody radiation using astronomical software, or dancing in front of hundreds of people, I am compelled to try any activity that interests me in the slightest.

My intense desire to know, to explore beyond the bounds of rational thought; this is what defines me. Costco fuels my insatiability and cultivates curiosity within me at a cellular level. Encoded to immerse myself in the unknown, I find it difficult to complacently accept the "what"; I want to hunt for the "whys" and dissect the "hows." In essence, I subsist on discovery.

## Essay #2

The most exciting time to live in Vermont is mid-February. This is the time when one is given the privilege of a 30-minute walk to school in sub-zero temperatures, with a 30-minute trudge home in the dark after a long day. It's been four months since winter began, and it'll be two more until it's over. The firewood is being rationed to keep the house at a barely livable temperature, a steamy 50 degrees, and colds are so rampant that people lose half their body weight in phlegm each day. Yet, however dull Vermont may seem to students and teachers as they wrap themselves in layer after layer of flannel, make no mistake, today is the beginning of an era. Today is the day when Isaac (that's me) starts his job of putting smiles on grim faces as the reader of the morning announcements.

"But Isaac, that job is super boring! You just read what's written on a piece of paper," is what an uninformed person might say, someone who obviously doesn't know about my passion for annoying the tired and melancholic with

smiling positivity. While expression and humor has not historically been a part of this process, and while ad-libbing has been strictly advised against, I go for it anyway. And why not? The worst possible outcome involves only a stern lecture and an expulsion from the job.

Fortunately, there is not much going on this week, which means I have some wiggle room with what I can say. The loud buzz of the intercom whines throughout the school, and the silent apprehension of the day is met, somewhat unexpectedly, with a greeting of 20 “yo’s” and a long, breathy pause. I artfully maneuver someone else’s writing into my own words, keeping the original intent but supplementing the significant lack of humor with a few one-liners. I conclude by reminding everyone that just because the weather is miserable today does not mean that we have to be as well.

Luckily, the principal loves it. And despite the fact that I urge everyone to interrupt my history teacher’s classes to wish him a happy birthday, I get to keep my job for another day. I have people coming up to me left and right, telling me that I made them smile. When I hear that, I smile back.

For the rest of the month, I work to make sure that people hear my message: even though we are at the time when school and winter are beginning to seem endless, there are still reasons to grin. I urge people to attend basketball games or sign up for spring sports. I announce birthdays and other special events. Before every day, I make sure I have a message that will make people think, “you know, today might not be so bad after all.” After my month ends, the announcements have been changed. The next readers tell jokes or riddles, or sing songs and invite others to sing with them. I watch the announcements evolve from an unfortunate but necessary part of the day to a positive and inspiring event. It is now more than just a monotonous script; it becomes a time to make sure that everyone has at least one thing to smile about.

Life shouldn’t have to be a dreary winter day; it should be the satisfaction of a good saxophone solo or the joy of seeing one’s friends every day at school. It is the enthusiasm of a biology teacher, the joy of a sports victory, and even the warm messages of a disembodied voice on the intercom. I use that message to help freshman feel less nervous at their first race or to encourage my friend to continue taking solos in jazz band. And in the most dismal time of year, I use that message in the daily announcements.