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Itumeleng Molefi

| South Africa |

FROM: keabetswekb62@gmail.com
TO: ookeditse.dabula@students.ui.edu.ng
DATE: Tuesday, 12 July, 17:54
SUBJECT: Personal essay for scholarship application

Hi Ookeditse

I hope Ibadan is treating you well.

Thank you again for agreeing to help me with this. And an even bigger THANK YOU for not telling Ofentse about this. I know that he loves me and that he only has good intentions, but he always wants to micromanage everything I do!

My essay is attached. I decided to go with the following prompt: Tell us about a person who has had a major influence on you and describe that influence.

I know that it is way above the word limit, so I need help in deciding what to cut and how to generally make it more coherent.

Looking forward to hearing back from you.

Kea

PS: We studied viruses in Biology last week at school. Yesterday we started looking at health pandemics of the past (like the influenza outbreak of 1918, the COVID-19 pandemic

of 2019-23 and all the different SARS pandemics) and how each one changed public health policies. I think public health medicine is what I'd like to specialise in.

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FROM: ookeditse.dabula@students.ui.edu.ng
TO: keabetswekb62@gmail.com
DATE: Wednesday, 13 July, 11:04
RE: Personal essay for scholarship application

Good morning Keabetswe

Ibadan is good, thank you for asking. I trust that Gaborone is treating you and your mother well.

I read your essay. Please find it attached with my comments in italics and red.

There are parts of it that I believe work exceptionally well (which you should keep) and other parts that you should think about cutting out completely.

To be honest, though, I expected to read a lot more about your father. The few times that Ofentse has spoken to me about him, I got the impression that the two of you were very close.

Another thing is that it is only at the end of your essay that you start to make connections between your parents, their influence on you and why you want to become a doctor. I think that if you write more about your father's death, you can start making these connections much earlier and bring these different aspects together in a beautiful way.

Of course, you do not have to do this if you are not feeling up to going to that emotional place.

Let me know what you think.

Kindest

O

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All my life I have known that my parents did not take the job of parenting me and my big brother lightly. It is there in my name. Keabetswe: I have been given a sacred offering. And because of this, they very purposefully ensured that they had a profound influence on my life.

I love learning new things: asking questions and pursuing the answers to those questions is something that has always driven me. I can trace my love of seeking knowledge to my mother. When I was in grade one back in South Africa, she basically forced me to love reading.

My classmates and I were taught how to read using a reader. In grades one, two and three, we would get a reading book at the beginning of the year with characters who grew up with us each year. The main characters were a little boy and girl, their pet dog and their mother and father. They would go to school, make new friends, play at home and so on. And as we progressed through our grades, they got older and their world was made bigger with things like trips to shopping malls and visiting family and their world became more populated by extended family and new friends. And as their world grew bigger, our vocabulary and grammar grew with it.

Every day, we would spend some time reading a page or two with our teacher in class. Part of our homework would be to practice what we had learnt by reading aloud to our parents when we got home. When I was still in grade one, every day, without fail, my mother would always instruct me to read a page or two beyond the assigned reading. I hated this so much! I didn't like having to struggle with new words I did not know. I saw this as eating into my

valuable play time with my friends. However, halfway through the year, I had already finished reading the entire reader. As a result, I was bored with having to re-read it in class and so I started looking for other reading material.

I love this story of how you developed your love for reading.

We need to find a way to connect the paragraph above to the one below.

It has been two generations since anyone on both my mother and father's side of the family completed their university education. Constraints like finances or health pandemics or the unstable socio-economic situation in South Africa always intervened. It is my aspiration to finally break this cycle. I know that in order to achieve my goal of becoming a medical doctor, I will have to work exceptionally hard. The value of hard work is something that I have learnt from both my parents.

The movement between these two paragraphs does not flow well for me. There is a disjointedness about the transition.

The SARS-5 pandemic that killed millions, my father's death and the other events leading up to Black September were not enough to convince my mother to leave the country. My mother tells me that everyone who had any money in any financial institution lost everything before the end of that month. Millions left the country, but my mother decided that we should stay.

My mother was a single parent who was also supporting her elderly parents. We moved to a plot of land where my paternal grandfather grew some crops so that we had something to eat. When it became clear that my grandfather's farm would not be able to sustain us and the other relatives who came to live with him, my mother decided that we should leave South Africa. I was nine years old and my brother was fifteen.

Before he died, my father believed in South Africa so much. He believed that, because of our history, we all had a part to play in making the country work and applied himself so much to his job as a post office clerk, despite the quick decline of the postal service at the time.

However, my mother always had mixed feelings about leaving South Africa. She had to drop out of nursing school because her parents could not afford to keep her there and all funding that had previously been available was no longer there. It was my father who convinced her to stay all those years when he was still alive. But when faced with the prospect of having her children starve, she lost the hope that my father had instilled in her and left.

This is the only time you mention your father's death. Why is it so brief?

When we got to Botswana, she would travel back and forth between Johannesburg and Gaborone buying synthetic and human hair from suppliers in downtown Joburg to sell to the hairdressers in Botswana's capital. The Batswana have never liked travelling to South Africa because of all the violence back home. This meant that people like my mother could earn a living as middle men and women between the two countries.

However, starting a new life in Botswana has not just been economically difficult, it has also been socially taxing as well. South Africa continues to be notorious around the world for the violence it inflicts on foreign nationals. My mother always tells me that we have no right to get angry at the Batswana when they get angry and violent towards us. South Africans in South Africa continue to attack and kill foreigners for "bringing the SARS-5 virus into the country" or "stealing relief money meant for South Africans." These are the same things we are accused of in Botswana.

My mother keeps telling me that we are lucky that the people of Botswana are not as violent to us as South Africans are to African foreigners. However, it still used to hurt a lot when I was called names and insulted by my schoolmates and even adults. The emotional abuse was a lot to take for a developing child. My mother continues to be my pillar.

The last sentence above feels misplaced.

One day, just after I had started high school, I came home from school and told her about what one of my teachers had said. When he found out that three of us were South African, he told us how our country had been built by white people who exploited us, whereas the

Batswana had done everything themselves. He told us that after 1994, we were not able to get over our inferiority complex and so the white people kept on exploiting us. He also said that we were unable to manage our country and that is why our economy failed and why we had to run to other countries so we would not die of hunger. He ended this tirade by telling us to go back home and fix our country instead of messing up their country.

At the time I wanted so badly to demonstrate to him the pride that my father had instilled in me about my home country. I wanted to tell him of the great nation that we once were. I wanted to tell him about our incredible mining industry and how we used to produce more gold and diamonds than any other country in the world. How we pioneered scientific discoveries that helped to create modern day technology that we take for granted. How we were the ones who used to lead military missions that protected people across the African continent. How we helped to build the economies and democracies of countless countries across the continent. And in this way, I would have shown him that it was people from his country (and numerous other African countries) who drained our resources in South Africa. I wanted to show him that we were not to blame like he believed.

I think this is very dangerous rhetoric, Keabetswe. Many of the South Africans that I have met who moved to other parts of Africa somehow continue to blame other Africans for things having gone wrong back home. This is still true even after history has shown us that foreigners are not to blame for our problems. I do not think that your teacher was right to talk to you like that (especially because you were so young), but holding onto the idea that things went sour in SA because of other African nationals is not going to do you, or any of us, any good.

Let us also be pragmatic. I know that this application for funding is to an organisation based in South African, but the aggressive national pride that you have expressed here may not go down well with the selection committee.

“You know that if we had any other choice, we would go back, right?” my mother said to me that afternoon. She reassured me, like my father used to when he was still alive, that I should not be ashamed of being South African and what happened at home, because what happened there was not my fault.

Your mother's response breaks my heart. Because you were so young, I think she could have been more compassionate.

Because of my mother, my sense of self-worth has not been diminished by anything anyone has said to me because of my nationality. Things continue to go wrong in my home country but I continue to have hope and to keep dreaming of the day when I can finally return for good. Funding from your organisation will give me the chance to return home and become a world class public health practitioner and help to rebuild South Africa and make it the greatest nation on this continent once again.

This is the only paragraph where you attempt to bring everything together: your parents, their influence on you and why you want to be a doctor. This may be a good place to bring in your father's death?

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FROM: keabetswekb62@gmail.com
TO: ookeditse.dabula@students.ui.edu.ng
DATE: Thursday, 21 July, 23:16
RE: Personal essay for scholarship application

Hey Ookeditse

I'm sorry that I have taken such a long time to respond. School has been keeping me busy.

I want to start off by saying that I do not think that my fellow South Africans in the diaspora and I are being dishonest about what led to the destruction of our home country. I do not think that it is "dangerous rhetoric", as you call it.

All the things I mention in my essay about what South Africa did in the past are true. I also believe that if our government did not have to take care of not only its own citizens, but the many citizens from other countries, then we might have made it through the SARS-5

pandemic in better shape. I don't see how expressing that opinion can be dangerous.

With regards to my father: I think that you're right. He does need to feature more in the essay. However, having to think about him has been the main reason for my delayed response.

I decided not to think too much about how to include more of him in my essay. Instead, I decided to just write about him and my feelings around losing him.

I managed to write the few paragraphs that are attached. I could not bring myself to carry on writing because the memory of his loss just hurts too much.

Let me know what you think about the direction I could take with this.

Keep well

Kea

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For me, losing my father meant losing my personal life coach. My father was the one person who was always in my corner cheering me on. My father was the one person I could talk to about anything and everything without any judgement. He never told me to not be loud, to stop playing roughly, to stop playing boy's games, to stop being fierce. He never expected me to “behave like a girl” in the same way that other people around me told me to. He would talk to me like I was his equal, let me go on and on and talk so much nonsense and then bring me back to what was most important or what I needed to learn by showing me reason. He was, and continues to be, so instrumental in shaping the person I am today.

My father was one of the millions of victims of the SARS-5 pandemic from around the world. Like billions of others around the world who lost family and friends, we were not able to

give him a proper burial. He was buried in a mass grave and unlike in some parts of South Africa, and in other countries, the government officials who did the burial did not make sure that we could identify the bodies of our loved ones once the pandemic passed. To this day, my father is buried in a mass grave somewhere outside Barkly West. They could not even tell us which one.

But the thing that hurts me the most is not the hostile treatment we continue to get from government officials about my father's remains or that we don't know where his final resting place is. What hurts the most is that, like so many others, we were not able to be with him during his final days.

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FROM: ookeditse.dabula@students.ui.edu.ng

TO: keabetswekb62@gmail.com

DATE: Friday, 22 July, 11:47

RE: Personal essay for scholarship application

Good morning Keabetswe

Do not worry about the delayed response. I understand completely.

I think that it is important to come to this issue with the facts, compassion and empathy. Many of the so-called "peace-keeping missions" that South Africa headed were about securing resources that multinational corporations wanted access to. In doing this, these missions helped to make the socio-economic situation in countries like the DRC and CAR worse for their people. What other choice did they have but to leave and to go to the country that was prospering off of their suffering? Another thing to consider is that like many other countries across Africa, South Africa's economy was over reliant on mineral resources. Once those resources started running out, it exposed how the country had not truly diversified its economy like our leaders had been saying. Obviously, the economy had to fail.

The point is that these circumstances had nothing to do with foreign nationals.

Coming back to the essay: what you wrote in the first paragraph about what your father meant to you is beautiful. You managed to capture so much in those few words.

I think what we should do is perhaps have a conversation about him first and brainstorm how you might incorporate him into your essay (and maybe also hash out the issue about South Africa's failed economy?). Or maybe you might want to scrap the old essay and start afresh with your father being the focal point?

Let me know when it will be best to do a voice or a video call with you. I'm able to talk in the afternoon anytime after 2 pm, tomorrow or on Sunday.

Kindest

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FROM: keabetswekb62@gmail.com
TO: ookeditse.dabula@students.ui.edu.ng
DATE: Wednesday, 27 July, 16:24
SUBJECT: Personal essay for scholarship application (new version)

Hi Ookeditse

Once again, thank you so much for the talk on Sunday. It helped me to work through a lot of things.

I read some of the pieces you suggested. Some of them make very interesting arguments but I'm not entirely convinced. I did my own research and found some pieces that I would

like you to read as well that counter what you are insisting. We can talk about that when you have had time to read them.

Anyway, I think I have figured out the essay (and I kept it under the word limit). Please find attached.

Keep well

Keabetswe

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Losing my father has been the most painful experience I have ever gone through. Not only did I have to deal with the pain of losing him the way that I did, but I had to deal with the pain of losing the role that he played in my life.

My father was my biggest cheerleader, a pillar of strength that kept me grounded and centred, and one of the few people in my life who encouraged me to be everything that I was. As a child, he never attempted to get me to make myself small and accommodating like girls are usually taught. He let me play with girls and boys alike and gave me the freedom to explore the world in its beauty and vastness. Talking to him was one of my favourite things to do. Unlike most adults, he never spoke down at me. He spoke *to* me, he let me speak in circles, not making any sense and then he would make me see what I had to say with new eyes by showing me how to reason properly.

My father was one of the over three million world-wide victims of the SARS-5 pandemic. The thing that hurts the most about his passing is that, like so many others, we were not able to be with him during his final days. The last time I saw him, he was healthy and smiling and happy. He had none of the symptoms that I kept hearing about on the news and at school. He walked me to school and kissed me good-bye at the school gate.

As soon as a test he got at work confirmed that he had contracted the SARS-5 virus, he was

immediately taken to the quarantine hospital at the 3-SAI military camp outside Kimberley. He was able to call my mother to let her know what had happened. When my brother and I got to talk to him later that day, he told us that he did not know when he would be able to talk to us again because his phone's battery was very low and that it was going to be difficult for him to get it charged. That was the last time we spoke to him.

After the end of the SARS-5 pandemic, things got worse in South Africa. My mother managed to pick up the pieces and moved us to Botswana. Despite the excellent marks I get at school, Botswana's government cannot pay for my tertiary education because I am a foreign citizen. Funding from your organisation will go a long way in helping me realise my dream of becoming a public health practitioner. This will allow me to ensure that no one ever has to go through the experience that my family and I went through during the SARS-5 pandemic.
