



Common App Essay Prompt #5: *Discuss an accomplishment, event, or realization that sparked a period of personal growth and a new understanding of yourself or others.*

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Just a few months ago, one of my best friends confided in me that he was transgender and would soon be presenting and identifying as female. I consider myself open-minded, and I had long assumed that he was gay or bisexual, so I was surprised at how difficult it was to process this information.

In the coming months, I supported my friend however I could. I was with him (hereafter: she/her) when she wore makeup in public for the first time, and when she wore a dress and new female enhancements to her outward appearance. I watched her enter the outside world with a mask of courage yet a strong glimmer of terror behind her eyes, like a newborn animal wandering into a field of predators.

My friend deals with the constant challenges of being transgender with a courage and a resilience that I admire beyond anything else. Watching her over these months, I have been forced to constantly consider what her experience is like, which opens my eyes to tremendous ease and blessings that blanket my own life.

This experience has sparked in me a profound realization, and one that I think is more important than just about anything. And that is the power of empathy. Through empathy, we can conquer all prejudice and ignorance, all racism, sexism, and bigotry. More than that, by truly considering the lived experiences of others and deferring to their perspectives, we can live life with greater peace and humility.

I feel that I am still in the process of realizing the full potential of my own empathy, but I have made significant strides. I view homeless people and drug addicts through an entirely new lens. The prison population looks much less monolithic now. Where I may have once looked down upon others, I now try to view them on an equal plane.

As my friend faced bullies and insulting jabs through the end of her junior year in high school, I stood by her and tried to give her the strength that she needed. At the same time, instead of reacting to the bullies with anger, I started feeling sad for them. As I communicated these thoughts to my friend, we both achieved a new understanding of how to be confident in the face of hostility and ridicule.

If everyone could be so lucky to have an experience such as mine, the world would be a much better place. I am so fortunate to have found the power of empathy, and it is because of this realization that I am now planning to study social work in the university. I can think of no better career than one spent helping others, combining empathy with action to make the world a better place.