



Elite Education Student Service

Personal Essay Prompt: Some students have a background or story that is so central to their identity that they believe their application would be incomplete without it. If this sounds like you, then please share your story.

Essay #2 “Nigeria?” exclaimed the man sitting next to me, failing to mask his confusion. “Yes, Nigeria” I said, confirming that I had enjoyed my years spent in Nigeria the most. My fellow traveller remained stupefied, and to some degree, offended: how could I prefer the squalor of Lagos to the elegance of Melbourne, Aberdeen, or Houston? Had I answered him, I might have explained that there was a beauty that arose from the apparent chaos – an observation that taught me the importance of learning through experience rather than relying on what others have said. To my mind, this sentiment is best embodied in the Nigerian dish, Suya. In rickety stands alongside polluted streets, thin slices of chicken, obtained from dubious sources, are marinated in a myriad of seasonings before being grilled above a makeshift fire. Few would risk taking a bite of this culinary adventure. Yet, to me, Suya is a delicacy, a prime example of exquisite cuisine. A sprinkle of sweetness, followed by a tidal wave of spice, Suya is unlike anything I have ever tried. If you are willing to put your fear aside and place your curiosity first, as I have learnt, then Nigeria, like Suya, becomes a rich medley of flavour and colour. Where better to find such an explosion of colour in Lagos than in Lekki Market? Ghanaian textiles of orange, green, and red, mahogany-coloured handcrafted sets of ducks, and tall, slim statues of African soldiers in green and blue colonial uniforms; Lekki had it all. With its dirt floors, wooden shacks, and conspicuous absence of Apple logos, it was no Houston Galleria, but for me it was human. Lekki was not selling comfort, but culture. It reminded me that there was more to life than Gameboys, television, and pocket money. It was also a reminder that we are all inter-connected. Behind the face of every merchant, I could see a family needing support, children hoping for food. Two hundred Naira could feed a child for a day. It could also get me an extra slice of pizza at lunch. I did not have to know these children personally to be conscious of the fact that my choice to buy a slice of pizza over craftwork from their parents could be the cause of a child going hungry. These faces taught me that the impacts of our choices, however apparently personal, are never truly one’s own. Above all though, what I most appreciated about Nigeria was its people. When my brother and I were younger, Femi, our driver, would place us on his shoulders and run around as if we were his own kids. We knew that he did not live an easy life, and yet he was not begrudging of us. We went to private school whilst his children would be lucky if they went to school at all. Femi did not resent us; rather he had nothing but love for us. Growing up all over the world, my brother and I experienced how difficult it was to be welcomed into a new culture, and ironically, we were best received in the country with which we had the least in common. It became clear that the Nigerians that I met had a sense of community and mutual care that I have not often come across in such abundance; there is much we could learn from them. Clearly, there is truth to be learnt everywhere, so long as we can keep an open mind, a lesson I always try to bear in mind. Prior to moving to Nigeria, I had shared the same sentiments as the man sitting next to me on the plane. Fortunately, my time in Nigeria forced me to challenge these views, and in doing so, opened my eyes to the importance of independent thought. As such, I will never cease to challenge both my own views and those of others.