

Kaleigh Personal Essay

It begins the same way every night.

I wearily walk upstairs to my bedroom and crawl under my soft, down comforter. My bedding is warm and comfortable. It should make me feel safe, like a sanctuary, embracing my fatigue and allowing me to sail away into a land of dreams.

But it doesn't. Instead, I lay still for what feels like hours, a sailor adrift at sea. I yawn, and my eyes begin to flutter close. And, for a brief second I think: Maybe it will be different this time.

Maybe I will fall asleep easily.

But then the thinking begins...

Did I charge my phone? Did I pack the right suit for the swim meet? Did I remind my mom about the Mission Trip Car Wash? I have three tests tomorrow. What if I am tired? What if I sleep through my alarm? Why am I not asleep?

Tick Tock.

The second hand of my clock creeps slowly round.

For the last three years, nighttime was always the worst part of my day. When evening's darkness invaded, a small voice in my head would whisper: *How long will it take to fall asleep tonight?* I would try anything: drink chamomile tea, darken my shades, put on classical music, and even chant sleep mantras. This ritual became my brain's personal dictator, and I followed orders precisely. I worried that if I strayed even the tiniest of bits, I would never fall asleep. But, nothing worked. I couldn't shut down my brain.

One night, however, was different. I crawled into my bed feeling truly exhausted. As my head hit the pillow, my eyes closed and I was asleep in seconds. The next morning, I was so confused: *How did I get to sleep so fast without my ritual?*

Finally, I had a moment of clarity. It was not my routine that helped me fall asleep, but my lack of one. While having a plan is important, if you are too rigid, the structure becomes a restriction. And, maybe my inability to fall asleep might just be a symptom of a bigger problem.

I have always been a worrier. I often placed a lot on myself to be the perfect student, daughter, friend, and athlete. I thought that if I worked hard, followed the rules and excelled that I could make everyone happy and control my world.

But somewhere along the way, I lost something important. Me. I realized that my sense of self-was based on other peoples' happiness and expectations. So not only was I losing my identity, I was putting pressure on myself to try to manage situations that were out of my control. My life is not a novel, and I cannot control the characters in my story. I also can't perfectly predict what will happen on the next page. I can only be and change me.

I have started small on my journey to self-discovery. I am taking an economics class NOT because I think it will look good on my transcript, but because the teacher is passionate about global issues. His excitement is contagious! He pushes my thinking about the world and my place in it. I look forward to more moments in life in which I am inspired to learn more and be more - as a person, a thinker, and a citizen.

I also dropped some of my community service to focus on a few that are meaningful and that I can contribute to more significantly. Finally, I decided to challenge myself and join the swim team. The coach inspires me to train hard and improve my time. The best part is that I have made a lot of new friends.

Anyway, it's a beginning. I don't have all the answers, but at least I am starting to ask the right questions. Ironically, my difficulty with falling asleep finally helped me to wake up!

