

Ali's Personal Essay

Unlike most teenage girls, the highlight of my summer consists of spending numerous hours in a car with my mom, my dad, and my dog driving cross-country just to visit family. Every summer, my family jams the car full of "necessities" including my guitar, the port-a-potty, and plenty of egg salad while my father constantly asks me "Got everything?" Ultimately, our goal is to journey nearly half way across the US from Memphis to Palm Springs within a week, but pretty soon I pretty much forget the destination and am lost in the epic journey.

To be honest, spending up to twelve hours a day in a car with two college professors can drive some people mad. Luckily, I've developed some tolerance for their habits of taking the wrong turns and their inflexible schedule. But past the background music of Frank Sinatra or The Cure, I hear how my parents really talk and see how they really feel. I guess some kids don't get to see their parents often or really know who they are, but from my experiences I definitely can tell someone all about my parents and their opinions. My parents are pretty different from me, so taking spending so much time with them allows me to accept their little quirks, and once we get home, I definitely am pretty accepting of other people's quirks too.

The most important thing that these yearly trips have provided me with is independence and exposure. I've seen many things the average girl would call strange. I've seen that not all people

look and live like me. I've learned how to fend for myself and to be "aware," as my mother would say. I credit these vacations with the source of my fashion sense, music taste, and food preferences. I remember seeing a girl in LA one summer wearing a long skirt and short hair, when in my hometown the fad was to wear short skirts and long hair. I still can't find a reason to why I wanted to dress like that girl, but I did. One of the most unforgettable memories I have of these trips was hearing one of my favorite songs in the Stratosphere hotel—"Young Folks" by Peter Bjorn and John. I had no idea what the song was called or who was the artist, but it consisted of bongos and whistling, and I felt this unbearable need to listen to it again. I've never heard music like that, and being exposed to something as simple as new music has made me want to know more about the world outside of my home and school. Seeing these things in my travels has made me brave enough to be what is considered "different" back home.

1. Capture the Big Picture

Ali begins her essay by establishing a key theme: she's different from other teenage girls.

2. Reorder Events

Ali chooses a key moment at which to begin her essay.

3. Look for Key Causes

In paragraph two, Ali homes in on the heart of her topic: what makes her different.

5. Draw Conclusions

The essay rounds off with a summative statement about Ali's personality.

4. Gather Evidence

Ali has selected key details to make her point—evidence of her self-evaluation.