

wdydwyd? Example Essays

Sample Essay #1

Ann Cooper

Director of Nutrition Services, Berkeley Unified School District
Berkeley, CA

I never cooked for kids. In my former life as a chef in the white-tablecloth restaurant world, one of my most dreaded events was having a host walk in the kitchen at 8pm on a Saturday night to tell me a six top with four hungry screaming kids was just seated.

My circuitous route from celebrated chef to renegade lunch lady landed me as the Director of Nutrition Services for the Berkeley Unified School District just over a year ago—and I'll never forget the food I saw served on my first day of school. Let me rephrase that—I'll never forget the “stuff” that was being served—food it was not.

“Stuff” highlights included frozen fried fake chicken parts, a gloppy sauce and fried noodle things on top: its title, “Asian Orange Chicken.” The district's freezer was filled with “grilled” cheese sandwiches, corn dogs, pizza pockets and of course the ubiquitous frozen burritos—all complete with an ingredient list a mile long.

The “stuff's” most memorable aspect was the packaging. Every item sealed in plastic with instructions for heating, holding and serving to our children in those very same plastic bags! You might wonder where the chemicals in the plastic goes after all that time and temperature change—undoubtedly, it's inside our children.

A year later all of our food is fresh and made from scratch. We cook every day. We serve fresh fruits and vegetables at every meal. We have salad bars in all of our schools. And all that frozen pre-packed stuff is banished from our children's plates.

Yesterday, I watched with delight as the 3rd and 4th graders prepared their salads, ate their enchiladas made by a small local company and the Three Sister's Stew, which they had previously learned to cook in their cooking classes. After lunch I went to the garden where the students made me a “weedo”—their take on a garden burrito—herbs and flowers wrapped in sorrel leaves. What a difference vision, hard work and real food can make!

I know I'm doing the most important work of my life—changing these children's relationship to food. I'm helping them understand the symbiotic relationship between food, soil, their health and the health of the planet. I am creating a model that will hopefully reverse the decline in the health of our nation's children and their world.

Why do I do what I do? Because every child deserves to have a delicious, nutritious school lunch.

Sample Essay #2

Michelle Sullivan

President, Ucross Foundation
Ucross, Wyoming

In July of 2002, while driving home on a lonely county road, a drunk driver turned left into my lane. My eighteen-month-old son was in the back seat and I, eight months pregnant, was driving. They tell me the impact was 104 miles an hour and there were no skid marks.

Three years earlier, my husband and I left Washington, DC and I accepted a job that allowed us to move home to Wyoming. I was pregnant with our first child. We decided that life was too short to spend it in a way that did not provide a sense of place to which we as Westerners were accustomed.

I was driven by a need to make a difference. I was also a mother caught up in the everydayness of baths, bedtimes, and the ensuing internal chatter about what's for dinner and bowel movements. But even in Wyoming, there was little time to really be a parent amidst my various responsibilities at work and at home.

As has been the case throughout my life, I was lucky and blessed even amidst a major trauma. My son was only bruised and shaken. My beautiful daughter Maggie has just turned three and is thriving. I am alive and was able to carry our third child, Catherine to term.

After the accident, however, I did not acknowledge the extent of my injuries nor the palpable internal shift that had taken place within me. It took three more years, when to continue my job would have meant the loss of myself to others' self-interests, to come to terms with who I was outside the realm of work.

To value oneself in a role that the world does not acknowledge is a formidable challenge and the exploration of what "life is short" really means has been a subtle and sometimes painful process.

I have begun to recognize that one can string together a life one public acknowledgement at a time. The world might define this life as successful while the living of it can remain meaningless. I am also discovering that the breath of a child as she dreams is exquisite, that laughter unlocks us, and that changing the world happens one very human relationship at a time.

Why do I do what I do? Because life is short. There is no promise of its length or conclusion. And our greatest contribution might very well be invisible to the world.

Sample Essay #3

Michael Merjanian

Emergency Medical Technician
Orange County, CA

It's two in the morning, and I am working a 24-hr shift. The phone rings—we have a "call." I get my boots on and run to the rig. When we get on scene, we see death threats written everywhere over the wall, empty alcohol bottles broken and dispersed, a loaded shotgun in the kitchen, and butcher's knife in the patient's hand. He wants to kill his girlfriend, but he messed up, he tried to kill himself first. I see his arm is bleeding and realize he slit his wrist. I wonder, "What am I doing? Why am I here, I could be at home, asleep."

I am twenty-one years old, born and raised in Orange County, California, an EMT, a man of faith and a student, but I realized *what* I do doesn't make me who I am; it is *why* I do it that really matters. My morals, values and beliefs shape who I am and consequently, what I do. Thinking about the night I had that call, I ask myself, "Why was I there?" I was there because I wanted to help.

Why do I do what I do? Because I believe that with hope and love all things are possible. If that patient had both, he wouldn't have been in that situation. I am an EMT and trying to become a doctor because it's the only way I know how to pass along what I have received in my life.