

UC Application, Prompt for All Applicants

Tell us about a personal quality, talent, accomplishment, contribution or experience that is important to you. What about this quality or accomplishment makes you proud and how does it relate to the person you are?

At an elevation of 8,839 feet above sea level, the world feels quite different. The wind blows relentlessly through your hair, carrying with it the crisp smell of summer pines. The air is thin, and your lungs feel hollow as you breathe. Below, a massive expanse of trees spreads across the landscape, trapped on all sides by immense granite walls. This is what it feels like to stand on top of Half Dome, Yosemite National Park's most iconic landmark.

I found myself on the top of Half Dome in the summer of 2013, gasping over the magnificent view that lay before me. However, it had not been easy to get there.

My dream to ascend Half Dome had been cultivated at a young age and was fueled by my family's annual trips to Yosemite. Every summer, I looked up at the massive granite face and wonder what it would be like to stand on top and gaze out over the valley below. But with an 18 mile round-trip hike and a 4,400 ft. elevation gain, Half Dome would not be conquered without a great deal of preparation.

The hike was set for mid-June, so my father and I prepared by hiking local trails. We covered many miles, practiced uphill climbing, and readied ourselves for severe elevation gain. I thought I was prepared. However, when the day finally arrived, I found myself tired, weak-kneed, and stressed.

The air was hot, and the bare heat of the sun pinned me down. One mile into the hike, my muscles burned and my feet ached. I felt as if all my preparation had been fruitless, and there was no way I could finish the hike. To add stress to my pain, I was joined on the hike by my aunt and uncle, both Ironman triathletes. Their superior physical ability made me feel weak and

unaccomplished. I staggered yards behind them, my inferiority making the hike seem many miles longer than it was.

Despite the stress and mental pressure that weighed down on me, I eventually reached the top. Upon my arrival, I stepped close to the edge and looked over Yosemite Valley. As the wind blasted through my sweat-laden hair, I felt as though I could see everything in the world.

The hike back down was quick and simple. As my tense muscles relaxed, I realized that I had finally made my dream come true.

This hike was incredibly important to me because I not only conquered my mental inertia to achieve a challenging goal, but also did so in a location that I consider to be the most majestic place on Earth. I had pushed my limits and persevered against unfavorable odds. This hike also exemplifies me as a nature lover, as I was constantly awed by the immense beauty and power of the wilderness, from the massive trees of Yosemite's high country to the breathtaking granite slopes I scaled to reach my destination. This hike provided me with both a closer connection to the natural world as well as a gratifying sense of complete and utter accomplishment.

Word Count: 515