

## Sample # 1

### My First Foreign

Friend My first foreign friend broke my heart. However, before I could have a foreign friend, I needed to travel abroad first. I have always wanted to go abroad and make friends around the world. Last winter, I was able to study abroad for four weeks in Toronto. While I was studying in Toronto, I met a Canadian girl named Jem. She told me that she wanted to make Japanese friends, so I was happy to talk to her. I was also happy to talk to her because she is so beautiful. Jem is half white and half Filipino, and I had never seen anyone like her before. It is safe to say that I fell in love with her at first sight, but not everything is meant to be.

At the beginning of our friendship, I was able to meet Jem often because we were language exchange partners. Jem helped me study English, and I helped her study Japanese. Gradually we became more and more friendly, so I invited her to go out to eat dinner with me. We went to a restaurant with her friends who also study Japanese. I talked a lot with her and her friends in English, and we ate katsu don. It is very delicious. Having dinner together made me very happy, and I think that my language skill improved.

One day, I went to watch an American football game with my Kwansei Gakuin friends. At the game, I saw Jem with another student. I said hello, and I asked about her friend. She said, "He is my boyfriend." That is, she had a boyfriend. I was surprised, and I was disappointed in love. Furthermore, her boyfriend was also Japanese and was studying abroad like me. I was sad because of that unbelievable fact. At that moment, I thought that my experience in another country was sad.

At last, the day I went back to Japan, I heard from Jem by email. In her email, she wrote, "thank you for being my friend. I want to meet you and speak in Japanese when I go to Japan this summer." Her email really made me smile. I forgot about my feelings at the football game and remembered all the great times I had in Toronto. Overall, I learned that life is made up of good and bad memories, but it is most important to remember the good ones.

## Sample # 2

### My First Time Cooking

When I was ten years old, I almost died in the kitchen. One day, I was the only one home because my parents went to an elementary school to teach, and my big sister was staying at her friend's house. I was bored, and I played video games a whole lot. In the early evening, I became hungry, but there was nothing to eat. I looked in our refrigerator, but there were only some vegetables and medium spicy curry roux. When I saw that, I thought, "my mother can make curry easily, so I can make curry, too." I decided to make curry by myself, but it would be dangerous because I had never cooked anything until then.

At first, I started to cook some rice. Second, I cut onions, but I couldn't stop crying for 20 minutes. After I stopped crying, I cut carrots. I did well partway, but I cut my middle finger because I didn't fold my fingers away from the knife. I felt foolish. I almost gave up, but I continued to cook. Next, I peeled potatoes with a peeler. I thought it was safe, but I was wrong. My nail was skinned a little by the peeler. After the vegetables, I prepared a deep pot and started to fry vegetables and chicken. However, another problem happened. Before I fried them, I forgot to grease the bottom of the pot and it burned. I moved them from the burned pot to another one, and I started to fry them again. There were a lot of problems, but I completed making curry at last.

After I made curry, I looked at my hand, and it was all cut up. There was some adhesive tape on it, but my heart was full of accomplishment. When I ate MY curry, it was very tasty. Later, when my mother got home, she ate my curry and said, "this is so delicious." She looked so happy, and I was so happy, too. After that, my father came back home, and he ate my curry, too. He was surprised that I had made curry by myself. My parents were happy, so I wanted to cook again.

These days, I often cook curry and rice by myself. Now that I know how to make it properly, I have become much better at it. I think it is good for us to try new things. Even if we are not perfect at first, we can become better and better. As they say, "practice makes perfect." In conclusion, while my first time cooking was terrible, it became an invaluable memory that I will never forget.

## Sample # 3

### Nothing Extraordinary

It was a Saturday. Whether it was sunny or cloudy, hot or cold, I cannot remember, but I do remember it was a Saturday because the mall was packed with people.

I was with my mom.

Mom is short. Skinny. It is easy to overlook her in a crowd simply because she is nothing extraordinary to see.

On that day we strolled down the slippery-slick tiles with soft, inconspicuous steps, peeking at window boutiques in fleeting glances because we both knew we wouldn't be buying much, like always.

I remember I was looking up at the people we passed as we walked — at first apathetically, but then more attentively.

Ladies wore five-inch heels that clicked importantly on the floor and bright, elaborate clothing. Men strode by smelling of sharp cologne, faces clear of wrinkles — wiped away with expensive creams.

An uneasy feeling started to settle in my chest. I tried to push it out, but once it took root it refused to be yanked up and tossed away. It got more unbearable with every second until I could deny it no longer; I was ashamed of my mother.

We were in a high-class neighborhood, I knew that. We lived in a small, overpriced apartment building that hung on to the edge of our county that Mom chose to move to because she knew the schools were good.

We were in a high-class neighborhood, but as I scrutinized the passers-by and then turned accusing eyes on Mom, I realized for the first time that we didn't belong there.

I could see the heavy lines around Mom's eyes and mouth, etched deep into her skin without luxurious lotions to ease them away. She wore cheap, ragged clothes with the seams torn, shoes with the soles worn down. Her eyes were tired from working long hours to make ends meet and her hair too gray for her age.

I looked at her, and I was ashamed.

My mom is nothing extraordinary, yet at that moment she stood out because she was just so plain.

Mumbling I'd meet her at the clothes outlet around the corner, I hurried away to the bathroom. I didn't want to be seen with her, although there was no one important around to see me anyway.

When I finally made my way to the outlet with grudging steps, I found that Mom wasn't there.

With no other options, I had to scour the other stores in the area for her. I was dreading returning to her side, already feeling the secondhand embarrassment that I'd recently discovered came with being with her.

I couldn't have been more wrong. Mom was standing in the middle of a high-end store, holding a sweater that looked much too expensive.

She said, "This will look good on you. Do you want it?"

It was much too expensive. And I almost agreed, carelessly, thoughtlessly.

Then I took a closer look at the small, weary woman with a big smile stretching across her narrow face and a sweater in her hands, happy to be giving me something so nice, and my words died in my throat.

I felt like I'd been dropped into a cold lake.

Her clothes were tattered and old because she spent her money buying me new ones. She looked so tired and ragged all the time because she was busy working to provide for me. She didn't wear jewelry or scented perfumes because she was just content with me.

Suddenly, Mother was beautiful and extraordinarily wonderful in my eyes.

I was no longer ashamed of her, but of myself.

"Do you want it?" My mom repeated.

"No thanks."

## Sample # 4

### Pants on Fire

I never kissed the boy I liked behind the schoolyard fence that one March morning. I never had dinner with Katy Perry or lived in Kiev for two months either, but I still told my entire fourth-grade class I did.

The words slipped through my teeth effortlessly. With one flick of my tongue, I was, for all anybody knew, twenty-third in line for the throne of Monaco. “Actually?” the girls on the swings beside me would ask, wide eyes blinking with a childlike naivety. I nodded as they whispered under their breath how incredible my fable was. So incredible they bought into it without a second thought.

I lied purely for the ecstasy of it. It was narcotic. With my fabrications, I became the captain of the ship, not just a wistful passer-by, breath fogging the pane of glass that stood between me and the girls I venerated. No longer could I only see, not touch; a lie was a bullet, and the barrier shattered. My mere presence demanded attention — after all, I was the one who got a valentine from Jason, not them.

This way I became more than just the tomboyish band geek who finished her multiplication tables embarrassingly fast. My name tumbled out of their mouths and I manifested in the center of their linoleum lunch table. I became, at least temporarily, the fulcrum their world revolved around.

Not only did I lie religiously and unabashedly — I was good at it. The tedium of my everyday life vanished; I instead marched through the gates of my alcazar, strode up the steps of my concepts, and resided in my throne of deceit. I believed if I took off my fraudulent robe, I would become plebeian. The same aristocracy that finally held me in high regard would boot me out of my palace. To strip naked and exclaim, “Here’s the real me, take a look!” would lead my new circle to redraw their lines — they would take back their compliments, sit at the table with six seats instead of eight, giggle in the back of the class when I asked a question. I therefore adjusted my counterfeit diadem and continued to praise a Broadway show I had never seen.

Yet finally lounging in a lavender bedroom one long-sought-after day, after absently digesting chatter about shows I didn’t watch and boys I didn’t know, I started processing the floating conversations. One girl, who I had idolized for always having her heavy hair perfectly curled, casually shared how her parents couldn’t afford to go

on their yearly trip the coming summer. I drew in an expectant breath, but nobody scoffed. Nobody exchanged a secret criticizing glance. Instead, another girl took her spoon of vanilla frosting out of her cheek and with the same air of indifference revealed how her family wasn't traveling either. Promptly, my spun stories about swimming in crystal pools under Moroccan sun seemed to be in vain.

The following Monday, the girls on the bus to school still shared handfuls of chocolate-coated sunflower seeds with her. At lunch, she wasn't shunned, wasn't compelled to sit at a forgotten corner table. For that hour, instead of weaving incessant fantasies, I listened. I listened to the girls nonchalantly talk about yesterday's soccer game where they couldn't score a single goal. Listened to their parent's layoff they couldn't yet understand the significance of. I listened and I watched them listen, accepting and uncritical of one another no matter how relatively vapid their story. I then too began to talk, beginning by admitting that I wasn't actually related to Britney Spears.

## **Sample # 5**

### **Eggs and Sausage**

When first I sat down in the small, pathetic excuse of a cafeteria the hospital had, I took a moment to reflect. I had been admitted the night before, rolled in on a stretcher like I had some sort of ailment that prevented me from walking.

But the nurses in the ward were nice to me, especially when they saw that I wasn't going to be one of the violent ones. They started telling me something, but I paid no attention; I was trying to take in my surroundings. The tables were rounded, chairs were essentially plastic boxes with weight inside, and there was no real glass to be seen.

After they filled out the paperwork, the nurses escorted me to my room. There was someone already in there, but he was dead asleep. The two beds were plain and simple, with a cheap mattress on top of an equally cheap wooden frame. One nurse stuck around to hand me my bedsheets and a gown that I had to wear until my parents dropped off clothes.

The day had been exhausting, waiting for the psychiatric ward to tell us that there was a bed open for me and the doctors to fill out the mountains of paperwork that come with a suicide attempt.

Actually, there had been one good thing about that day. My parents had brought me Korean food for lunch — *sullungtang*, a fatty stew made from ox-bone broth. God, even when I was falling asleep I could still taste some of the rice kernels that had been mixed into the soup lingering around in my mouth.

For the first time, I felt genuine hunger. My mind had always been racked with a different kind of hunger — a pining for attention or just an escape from the toil of waking up and not feeling anything. But I always had everything I needed — that is, I always had food on my plate, maybe even a little too much. Now, after I had tried so hard to wrench myself away from this world, my basic human instinct was guiding me toward something that would keep me alive.

The irony was lost on me then. All I knew was that if I slept earlier, that meant less time awake being hungry. So I did exactly that. Waking up the next day, I was dismayed to see that the pangs of hunger still rumbled through my stomach. I slid off my covers and shuffled out of my room. The cafeteria door was already open, and I looked inside. There was a cart of Styrofoam containers in the middle of the room, and a couple people were eating quietly. I made my way in and stared.

I scanned the tops of the containers — they were all marked with names: Jonathan, Nathan, Kristen — and as soon as I spotted my name, my mouth began to water.

My dad would sometimes tell me about his childhood in a rural Korean village. The hardships he faced, the hunger that would come if the village harvest floundered, and how he worked so hard to get out — I never listened. But in that moment, between when I saw my container and I sat down at a seat to open it, I understood.

The eggs inside were watery, and their heat had condensed water all over, dripping onto everything and making the sausages soggy. The amount of ketchup was pitiful.

But if I hadn't been given plastic utensils, I think I would have just shoved it all into my mouth, handful by handful.

## Sample # 6

### First Impressions

When I woke up on August 4, 2016, there was only one thing on my mind: what to wear. A billion thoughts raced through my brain as wooden hangers shuffled back and forth in the cramped hotel closet. I didn't want to come off as a try-hard, but I also didn't want to be seen as a slob. Not only was it my first day of high school, but it was my first day of school in a new state; first impressions are everything, and it was imperative for me to impress the people who I would spend the next four years with. For the first time in my life, I thought about how convenient it would be to wear the horrendous matching plaid skirts that private schools enforce.

It wasn't insecurity driving me to madness; I was actually quite confident for a teenage girl. It was the fact that this was my third time being the new kid. Moving so many times does something to a child's development ... I struggled finding friends that I could trust would be there for me if I picked up and left again. But this time was different because my dad's company ensured that I would start and finish high school in the same place. This meant no instant do-overs when I picked up and left again. This time mattered, and that made me nervous.

After meticulously raiding my closet, I emerged proudly in a patterned dress from Target. The soft cotton was comfortable, and the ruffle shoulders added a hint of fun. Yes, this outfit was the one. An hour later, I felt just as powerful as I stepped off the bus and headed toward room 1136. But as I turned the corner into my first class, my jaw dropped to the floor.

Sitting at her desk was Mrs. Hutfilz, my English teacher, sporting the exact same dress as I. I kept my head down and tiptoed to my seat, but the first day meant introductions in front of the whole class, and soon enough it was my turn. I made it through my minute speech unscathed, until Mrs. Hutfilz stood up, jokingly adding that she liked my style. Although this was the moment I had been dreading from the moment I walked in, all the anxiety that had accumulated throughout the morning surprisingly melted away; the students who had previously been staring at their phones raised their heads to pay attention as I shared my story. My smile grew as I giggled with my peers, ending my speech with "and I am very stylish, much like my first period teacher." After class, I stayed behind and talked to Mrs. Hutfilz, sharing my previous apprehension about coming into a new school and state. I was relieved to make a humorous and genuine connection with my first teacher, one that would continue for the remainder of the year.

This incident reminded me that it's only high school; these are the times to have fun, work hard, and make memories, not stress about the trivial details. Looking back four years later, the ten minutes I spent dreading my speech were really not worth it. While my first period of high school may not have gone exactly the way I thought it would, it certainly made the day unforgettable in the best way, and taught me that Mrs. Hutfilz has an awesome sense of style!

## Sample # 7

### Sorry, Wrong Number

My phone buzzes. An unfamiliar number with a 512 area code — I later find out it's from Texas. It's a selfie of a 30-something man, smiling with his family, a strange picture to receive as I live halfway across the country.

For the past three years, I — a 14-year-old girl living in Virginia — have been getting texts meant for this man, Jared. Over the years, I've pieced together parts of who he is; middle-aged, Caucasian, and very popular according to the numerous messages I've received for him.

Throughout this time, I've also been discovering who I am. When I received the first text, I was a playful sixth grader, always finding sly ways to be subversive in school and with friends. With this new method of mischief in my hands, naturally, I engaged:

“My sweet momma just told me that BYU Texas Club is holding a Texas Roundup free BBQ dinner on October 10th! Thought y'all would enjoy,” came one of the texts. After staring at the message for a while, I responded.

“YUMMMMY”

As time went on, the story of the mystery man deepened. I was halfway through sixth grade, for example, when I learned he was part of the “Elder's Quorum,” a rather ominous-sounding group. Looking it up, I learned that it was not a cult, as I'd initially thought, but rather an elite inner circle within the Mormon Church.

This was around the same time my family had stopped going to church. I'd started to spend more time taking art classes and trying out various sports — tennis, basketball, even archery — and soon church fell to the side. Instead, I meddled in the Quorum's group texts; when a message came about a member moving away, I excitedly responded, “Let me help y'all out, brother!”

I'm not sure exactly when it happened, but after a while I started to feel guilty about this deception. I wondered if I'd somehow ruined Jared's reputation, if his friends were turned off by my childish responses. I was also dealing with changes within my friend group at the time; the biggest change being letting go of a close but toxic friend; I realized that I needed friendships that were more mutually supportive.

Shortly after, I got a phone call from a strange woman. She started talking about the struggles in her life; her children, her job, even about how she wanted to leave Texas forever. In comparison, my own problems — the B minus I'd gotten, the stress of an upcoming archery tournament, the argument I had with my sister — all seemed superficial. I timidly informed her I wasn't Jared, and her flustered response told me that I should have told her at the start of the call.

A while later, I got another text: "Congratulations on getting married!" It had never occurred to me how much Jared's life had changed since I had received his number. But of course it did; over time, I'd outgrown my prankster middle school self, gained the confidence to build a solid friend group, and devoted myself to my primary loves of art and archery. Why wouldn't Jared also be settling into his own life too?

Though I've since taken every opportunity to correct those who text Jared, it still happens every once in a while. Just last month, I got another random text; all it said was: "Endoscopy!" When I got it, I laughed, and then I wrote back.

"Hey, sorry, you have the wrong number. But I hope Jared's doing well."