

## **Essay Topic #2**

**Explain how you may have been personally affected by a critical illness in your family (or friend) and what resources may be required to provide more assistance during this time?**

This essay relates to my personal struggle to understand and come to terms with my mother's mental disability. Since my earliest memories my mother was always an exceedingly caring and loving human being but she acted very differently to other mothers. Her problem was such that she felt an overwhelming feeling of persecution as well as betrayal. As such every letter or phone call and every trip or encounter with people, no matter how trivial, was a struggle that produced intolerable levels of anxiety and fear. To make matters worse, the nature of the illness was such that she was absolutely convinced the world was indeed the way she saw it. In her mind she was right and it was the world that needed a cure. The illness had its own defense mechanisms acting like antibodies against reality.

The most appropriate word that I can find for her illness is "consumed" as it consumed almost 20 years of my mother's life. It is also a reference to how much my mother was consumed by her illness. And lastly it refers to how much my own struggle consumed me.

For me it was a constant struggle between the reality that she portrayed and the reality of the outside world. It is very hard indeed when a child needs to make sense of reality at a very tender age. We are not prepared for it.

For me it was very hard to understand that she could not control what she was doing and that all her darkness and desperation were not directed at me. Every child should have a happy childhood and not be faced with impossible situations and decisions.

For me it was very hard to have friends and talk with other people because other people did not come from a family in distress. They could never understand me. If I spoke my problems it seemed to them like a foreign language impossible to translate.

Can you imagine being a child alone in a world that does not make sense? Can you imagine being a child isolated not only from reality but from common sense? Can you imagine a child being forced to imagine a better reality because the only one he has is unreal?

You are reading this essay now and here and you are thinking about this event in my life as if it would be a snapshot. Please wipe that image from your mind. It is not a snapshot; it is life itself continuous in its suffering and unending. Even when sleeping I was never really distanced from it for my life would always find a way so seep into my dreams tainting them with dread, fear and desperation.

Confusion is just a word. Lost is just a word. Trapped is just a word. But when combined together day after day after day with no hope of escape they become something else entirely. They become your personal jail. A child locked in a jail from where there is no escape, for the jail resides inside the child. If you are indeed in need of an image, I offer you this one. It truly represents my childhood.

Yet In the end, we were all lucky; I was lucky. Through a very long process my mother began to improve and she is now almost herself again. We have won her back.

Yes, I was lucky but how many children continue to be trapped? How many of them are unlucky? How many of them suffer in silence because there is no help for them? Most of them. You ask for suggestions to help them "during this time". But in so doing you have made the same mistake everybody else makes. The time to help is unending; there is no period of time. These children need a new life, a fresh life and you can't provide them with it. But what you can do is to give them perspective, give them the knowledge that reality is indeed different and others have made it. What they need is a shelter, an ongoing shelter that provides protection from their twisted reality; a shelter for the mind. This does not require lodging facilities but a safe meeting place. A place where children of the same life can meet, a place where all speak the same language, a place where they all understand each other; implicitly.

This is what those children need. You can always offer more, but what is required, what is necessary is not more but simply consistency. These children need to know that

whatever happens, whatever the turn their personal reality may take, the shelter will be there. Soothing. Unending. Safe. And this is all that is required. This challenge now falls on your shoulders. The question is not whether the need is there. The question is not even if this is the best help that can be provided. The question is what will you do now that you know.

I wrote this essay thinking of all the people facing the unspoken and unspeakable illnesses of the mind. They truly are the lepers of our time. Shunned by society and our health system, they barely exist on the edges of our reality. We don't share their word and they are prohibited from sharing ours. If we measure the humanity of a society by the manner in which it treats their most vulnerable members, we have failed and failed miserably.

My heart goes out those who suffer in silence trapped in the prison of their own minds and to all of them, unwilling passengers of the same nightmare.