Understanding of her own faith, and a
ambition remains, she moves toward a deeper
meaning of personal success. Though her
philosophical notion of the Good Life and the
for her to take a larger perspective on the
involves religion, faith as the means for survival.
shaken in her belief in her strict, strict
demoralizing agnostic raising on her campus.
academic achievement as she becomes active in
recognizers, her single-minded striving for
she had been used to in high school. She also
fact that she cannot maintain the high grades
competitive college brings her up against the
her status as a pre-med student in a highly
though she has many successes along the way,
high school and college. Though she describes a
determination to overcome obstacles in the way
The autobiographical focus on the author's

Running Hurdles

CASE 7
realized that my English class was far from honors level. I remember talking to a teacher who said that the level I was on was average. That was difficult for me to accept. My eighth-grade teacher once said, "You should always strive to be above average and should never let anyone consider you as average." Oh, no, I was not going to let someone look down his nose at me; I was just as capable of excelling as anyone else!

I used another self-teaching guide to aid me in preparation to take a placement exam to move to a higher level class. My book bag went with me everywhere: on long trips to grandma’s, to my parents’ meetings, to church, and even on the way to shopping centers. During this time people thought of me as a "little brain." I didn’t pay much attention to this, because the only thing that concerned me was getting ahead. I was not going to let those who teased me distract me from the tasks which would one day help me to become a great doctor. I knew that once I had accomplished my current academic goals, I would have time to move on to other things. Sure enough, I was put in a higher level English class after passing a placement test.

Having realized that I was academically sound, I then went out for track where I made only a small contribution, but I still remained dedicated. I enjoyed getting to know upperclassmen on the team, and I began to look forward to going to practice. I felt that by talking to older students I was taking a sneak preview of possibilities for my own future. More and more I wanted to complement my academic success with other types of accomplishment; therefore, I added reducing my hurdle times to my list of goals. The feeling of being down in the starting block, waiting for the gun to sound, gave me a sense of perfect concentration. I was filled with excitement as I cleared the hurdles and passed the finish line. I was inspired by the senior awards ceremony where I saw students acknowledged for their outstanding achievements in academics and athletics. I wondered if the same types of honors were to be a part of my future.

In my sophomore year I challenged myself by taking mostly gifted and talented courses. My enrollment in these classes was a result of careful planning. Freshman year I had looked through the course guide and noted all the honors courses that I wanted to take before I graduated. I talked to teachers
that I was in high school or some other institution. The math class was the only class that I was good at in high school and I relied on that for my success. I was good at math because I was able to understand the concepts and apply them in various situations. However, I was not as good at other subjects like English, Science, and Social Studies. I struggled with these subjects and I felt lost. I realized that I needed to work harder and put more effort into these subjects in order to improve my grades.

I also had to deal with personal issues. My family was having financial problems and we were living in a crowded apartment. My parents were always stressed and this made it difficult for them to focus on teaching me. My older brother was also having problems with the law and this added to our stress. I felt like I had to take on more responsibilities at home to help support my family.

Despite these challenges, I continued to work hard and improve my grades. I knew that I needed to do well in order to get into a good college and have a better future. I enrolled in AP classes and took on extra responsibilities at home to help support my family. I also sought help from my teachers and mentors and they were very supportive.

I realized that I needed to be more organized and manage my time better. I set goals for myself and created a schedule to help me stay on track. I also joined clubs and extracurricular activities to help me manage my stress and have some fun.

Looking back, I realize that my high school years were a time of growth and development. I learned a lot about myself and the world around me. I made mistakes and I learned from them. I also made some great friends and had some amazing experiences. I am grateful for the challenges that I faced and the opportunities that I was able to seize.

Overall, I am proud of the person that I became and the choices that I made. I believe that my high school years were a turning point in my life and I am grateful for all the experiences that I had.
In my nightmare, I find myself on a ship looking out at a dirty brown-grey body of water divided by a large brick wall. Boundless, the wall stretches as far as I can see up into the sky and out in every other direction. As I look into the water, I notice an object floating in its center. A strong and powerful force then pushes me forward, making my body press close to the ship. As the pressure intensifies along my upper spine, I begin to feel weak against the force, but somehow dominant over the unknown floating object. As the force increases, I am able to dive in the water and swim toward the object. Swimming fast causes my back to ache and arms to tire. Each stroke, though painful, seems to take me closer to the object. However, this feeling changes after about a minute. Suddenly it seems as though the object is moving away from me and towards the brick wall, which now seems more vast and blocks all light. I try to swim faster, but it does not seem to make much difference in the distance that I am from the object. Tired and puzzled, I stop swimming and reach out toward the object expecting to grasp nothing. Immediately I feel myself sinking. There is nothing that I can do to save myself; therefore, I take one last look at the object and the brick wall. I have arrived at the end of my journey.

As I now look back upon the dream, I can understand why I consider it infernal. In my interpretation of the dream the ship that I am standing on is my home. The force coming from my home represents my parents and other role models. They are trying to lead me toward the distant object symbolizing my goals. Those who support me are trying to make me see that my goals are real and obtainable. Their belief in me gives me confidence to dive into the world, symbolized here by the water. Unfortunately, once I am on my own, I begin to try to take on too many tasks without really knowing what I am getting myself into in the long run. As I begin to think that I am reaching my goals, I find out that times have changed. My goals are leaving me and are about to crash into a brick wall. I begin to believe that my goals are now unobtainable, but I reach out in vain, feeling that I still might have some dominance over them. After doing this, I begin to sink into the lower parts of the world. By losing hope of obtaining goals, I become a victim of my own efforts.

Because of this, I enter the bottomless lower world which is indeed Hell.

My worst fear has always been to have goals and not be able to obtain them. At the time when I had the nightmare, I never considered the possibility that it could come true, nor that God was a possible savior. I had not yet found the connection between my goals and Him. It was only while in college that I began to understand what a relationship with God could mean. Before then, I remained confused about how he would affect my personal development.

I am the daughter of a preacher. Though my father works many long hours in the church each week, he also has another occupation to help support us. As a preacher's kid (P.K.s, we call ourselves) I came face to face very early with many special expectations and problems. Most of the time I was puzzled by church members' inconsistencies and seeming hypocrisy. The biggest problem was watching people criticize one another. Being present at most of the church events, I became increasingly aware of jealousy. I have seen people upset with others for holding a particular office in the church, for singing too many solos, for dressing differently, and even for trying to become "buddy-buddy" with the pastor and/or his wife. This has always bothered me because, in seeking to learn more about God, I became more and more confused by the actions of those who claimed to be Christians. Inconsistencies became increasingly apparent as I became aware of these people's testimonials about how much the Lord had done for them. How could it be that these people could be so unkind to one another? Weren't these people supposed to be kinder than those who were in the "world"?

I became even more confused when it came down to matters concerning my father. I felt severe pain whenever I heard someone say something bad about my father. I became very bitter towards these people, mainly because I would hear these comments behind my father's back, yet see them smile to his face. I wondered how these Christians could be so cruel. Wasn't my father a servant of God? Did he, as their leader, deserve this treatment? I remember overhearing one particular woman challenge my father's judgment. I was hurt, for I truly believed that my father would not intentionally do anything that
I wanted to tip the board down, or just scribble on it. I wanted to
write, to express my thoughts and feelings. I wanted to
create drawings, to use my hands, to move my body.
I wanted to feel the physicality of the act, to experience the
process of creation.

However, I was not allowed to express myself in this way. I
was told that my drawings were not acceptable, that they
were not "good" work. I was criticized for my ideas, for my
technique, for my use of color. I was told that I was not
creative enough, that I was not good enough.

I felt like I was being punished for my own creativity. I
wanted to express myself, to feel the joy of creation, but I
was not allowed to do so. I felt like I was being silenced,
my voice was being suppressed.

I began to feel frustrated, angry, and resentful. I
began to feel like I was not being heard, that my ideas
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I began to feel frustrat
kick that stupid door—do something that showed that someone was not afraid of him or his malicious words. Something, however, always restrained me. No matter how great my resentment, I told myself I could not stoop to the level of that hateful young man who lived in the room next door. I prayed that I might maintain my dignity and self-control. Each day my roommate (who was black) and I talked late into the night about everything that was happening and our growing concerns. I always felt like a captive in the dorm, for even these private conversations were whispered so that none of our white neighbors would hear what we said. We were not really afraid of what might happen if others heard us, but we didn't want to run the risk of having our comments misinterpreted or purposely distorted.

It was during the days of protest that I began to understand the pressures upon people in the civil rights struggles of the sixties. More than twenty years later, efforts to correct situations of injustice continued. My uncle told me before I went to college, "Always remember where you've come from, where you're going, and who and what has helped you to get where you are and hope to be." There is no way that I can ever forget or ignore my past or the problems that still exist today.

During those days, I spent my mornings in class and my afternoons and nights protesting. I studied during any free moment I had. It was hard to do, but I had put protesting high up on my list of priorities. This was in spite of the fact that I knew other freshmen who had been asked to take a one-year leave to reevaluate their goals after a poor performance first term. I had to do what seemed right at the time. I worked hard to do the best I could in my classes—I had tutors and went to see my professors regularly. I was glad they all were understanding and knew the position I felt obligated to take. My Chinese language professor asked me to see him after class one day. He said he knew that I was involved in the protests and wanted to know how I was doing. We talked for quite a while and both of us had tearful eyes. I could tell that he cared and that what was happening was affecting him too. He was willing to work with me to make my coursework more manageable during this period. I knew that he and other professors understood the situation, and many were actively involved in the protests. For example, I met an English professor while we were both out picketing. He chatted with me then and whenever I saw him throughout the rest of the term.

I really valued the friendships that developed during the days of protesting. It seemed rare to find people who would really listen to what you had to say: not just hear your words but not your meaning. This was because we discussed, in addition to the incident with the black professor, many issues about student life which came to the surface. For example, many whites wondered why blacks seemed to separate themselves at dinner. Blacks wanted to know why we so often had to take time away from studying to protest things which shouldn't be happening in the first place.

In the midst of all the confusion, I learned to pray continuously. My time in prayer seemed to be the only time when I was at peace and the only thing that gave me strength to make it through the day. At the end of the term, in a class where I was the only black, we had a discussion about all the things that had happened. After hearing the comments about the "typical black" (which I didn't know existed) as well as some other radical and conservative views from my classmates, I felt obligated to say something. Before I did, however, I prayed briefly that I would be understood and not just heard. After stating my opinion and feelings, I thanked God for making me stronger that term than I ever had been in my life. From that day onward, I valued my college more than before because it had, however unintentionally, taught me to communicate with people from a wide variety of backgrounds and outlooks. It is only too bad that it took a crisis for people to start expressing their true feelings and concerns.

As I started to develop new friendships in college, I tended to share only parts of me, almost like a puzzle. Each piece would fit well with certain individuals, and not so well with others. I learned how best to mix and match those pieces so as to get along with different types of people. No matter how great the differences are between people, there has to be a common ground somewhere. It is unfortunate that a person's skin color, religious beliefs, nationality, or difference of views can sometimes distract us from other traits he or she might possess which could bring us closer. My friends who are
Case 2: Running Hillsides

"than God, 1000 years would be like a single day."

"I am self-conscious about my voice. My hands are always sweaty when I talk, and I..."

"...because of all my errors, all the mistakes I've made and all the wrong decisions I've..."

"...to God, even though I know He is always..."

"...about my voice. My hands are always sweaty when I talk, and I..."

"...because of all my errors, all the mistakes I've made and all the wrong decisions I've..."

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...because of all my errors, all the mistakes I've made and all the wrong decisions I've..."

...to God, even though I know He is always..."
God was trying to tell me something. I was reminded of the picture that my high school guidance counselor tried to paint for me of what life at a highly competitive college would be like. She told me to imagine the smartest person in my most difficult class who seemed to get As without really working hard for them. I should then think of a school where almost everyone was that type of student. She said that she knew that I got where I was (at the top of my class) by working extremely hard and by putting in extra time, and that was an accomplishment in itself. She warned me, however, that it might become unfulfilling or burdensome later. I found it difficult to accept that what I had always taken pride in (working hard) was now something that might not lead to success in the future. Once again in my life, someone was trying to discourage me from getting ahead. By reading extra books, doing additional problems, and asking about the practical applications of the course in class, I felt I was preparing for my future as a physician. That was my motivation, so although I was competing with people who caught onto some principles quicker than me, my concern was not with them, but with my goals.

As a college student I am beginning to see that perhaps Mrs. Riley was right in warning me about what I was going to be up against. I know that I have potential to succeed, so I have worked extremely hard in my classes and met with professors, obtained advice from grad students, had a tutor every term, and frequently met with my pre-med advisor and the academic skills director. Regardless of my efforts, my academic standing is not high. I have become disgusted with the grading system at my college. First of all, the science courses are graded on a curve. I hate to always have to compare myself to the mean, or actually all the other students in the class. I despise that, since learning is something that I feel is very personal. If my grade falls below the mean, my attitude toward the class changes. No longer is my emphasis on doing the best I can on an exam, but instead it is on getting at least the mean. I realize now that I was lowering my standards and settling for doing about the same as everyone else.

For the first time in my life, I have become accustomed to Cs and being a satisfactory student. I have had professors say to me "Cs are not bad. You'll still get into med school." By being on a campus where my right (or any other minority's) to be there is continuously being questioned, I have come to realize that it is necessary to excel and get As and Bs. Otherwise, people will doubt my credibility, and even worse, my ability.

It has been difficult for me to accept doors being closed due to the GPA. I remember that when invitations were sent out to students in my class to discuss the honors program as well as internship opportunities, I wasn't invited. Many people asked me why I wasn't there. Since I always walked about with a positive attitude, was involved in a professional society, and knew many important people on campus, they assumed I was somewhere near the top of my class. I couldn't really answer them because the pain I felt was unimaginable; I knew that I should have been there and I felt left out. As a result, I had to make a special appointment to discuss these programs. It hurt to realize that I had learned about them not because the college thought that I should know about them, but because of my own efforts. My mom always told me that sometimes you have to make things happen for yourself. I had to work very hard to get into higher levels of English and math years ago, so I naturally continue to seek out people and opportunities now that I am in college. I try to overcome any obstacles in my path, for my success has always come about because I have refused to settle for anything—regardless of the situation.

It was at a national youth leadership meeting in high school that I realized the true leader in me. Since that time I have been coming up with ideas of things I'd like to do. A while ago I developed a project that would try to encourage middle school students to become interested in science through role models. This project meant a lot to me, for I knew from personal experience that when you talk to people who are where you want to be, you begin to believe that you really can get there, too. During breaks, I had always called physicians, med students, or anyone else in health care who could tell me about the field and steps to get into it. In turn, I often spoke to students at different churches to try to get them interested in continuing their education. I believed these things could keep dreams alive for someone.

After spending a couple of months meeting with different people who could give me ideas about how to get my project started, I was just about ready to get it off the ground. I
relationship with God again.

I learned from this experience that I had to be more intentional in my relationship with God. I felt like I was just going through the motions, but I realized that I needed to actively seek His presence and guidance in my life.

My response to this experience was to seek the counsel of my pastor, who helped me to understand the importance of a personal relationship with God. He encouraged me to spend more time in prayer and meditation, and to read the Bible on a regular basis.

In addition to seeking counsel, I also began to make changes in my life to align with my newfound faith. I started attending church more regularly, and I made an effort to be more kind and compassionate to those around me.

As a result of these changes, I began to feel a sense of peace and fulfillment that I had never experienced before. I felt like I was on a new path, and I was excited to see where it would take me.

In conclusion, this experience taught me the importance of having a strong relationship with God. I realized that I could not do everything on my own, and that relying on God's guidance and strength was essential for growth and success.

Additional notes:

- This experience was pivotal in my life, as it helped me to understand the importance of a personal relationship with God.
- I made changes in my life to align with my newfound faith, which resulted in a sense of peace and fulfillment.
- I am grateful for the guidance and support of my pastor during this time.

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While growing up I used to wonder how God would influence my life. I have heard some older folks say that He is a "heart fixer, a way maker, and a mind regulator." God is able to be all these things for me. My life is in God's hands, and it is through His guidance that tomorrow's joy, treasures, and perhaps even a medical degree, shall be mine. I am so glad God forgives those who, like me, make the mistake of vainly trying to completely control their own lives. I truly believe the message in the words of the gospel song I have paraphrased in the first person to fit my own story:

I know somehow, and I know some way, I'm gonna make it! No matter what the test, whatever comes my way, I'm gonna make it! With Jesus on my side, things will work out fine!