

NARRATIVE ESSAY (Graduate Writing Requirement #1)

Job: Surveillance. Subject: Girl, 0 to 24. Impression: Much more than she seems.

Born in Houston, TX, the subject bloomed on the Connecticut shoreline. For two decades, life on the East Coast was stable for her, her parents, and several generations of fish. Less predictable was her reversal from striking gregariousness to excessive shyness at the start of her schooling. For years, her parents nudged their daughter outward, friend-ward, world-ward. Having fled South Vietnam in 1975 before the Communist takeover, they were keenly aware that America provided vast opportunities for fulfillment for persons of any background. Still, the subject's timidity proved a more challenging gulf to bridge than any cultural difference.

As she approached adolescence, she did motor forth with greater boldness, but not so much socially as with an internalized mission to flourish through academic success. She became that rare creature who never clasped a partner's hand, largely limited her travels to bus routes, and consumed more red ink "A's" than beer. Although she frolicked further and more frequently with friends as an undergraduate, her focus persisted and paid off with a *cum laude*-stamped diploma. She landed back in her college town as a publishing assistant for *Legal Affairs* magazine, and now, a master's degree in TV production is quivering in her crosshairs.

So, sheltered, conscientious small-town girl makes good. But a more illuminating portrait emerges from under her restraint and dutiful work ethic.

Before "let's learn the alphabet," the words "let's pretend" triggered the subject's earliest mental workouts, populating her home with spelunking princesses and pompous thieves. She and her best friend broadened their classroom-honed communication skills,

trading Vietnamese titles like “Ba” for English verbs like “pop,” and improvising a language inspired by Gibberish. In less familiar settings, the subject’s meekness did dilute her devotion to ballet and tap dance, then gymnastics, then swimming, then violin, then piano. But remnants of those lessons continually ignited her mind. Having absorbed the artistry of the physical, the splendor of the messy, and the litheness of the musical, she came to see intellectual and emotional vitality almost everywhere.

This sensitivity did not merely distract the subject from her academic agenda, but reshaped her desires. The intense imagination that inflicted violence on slur-whooping schoolmates roiled past bitterness to heal peers through vividly shared memories on an anti-prejudice panel. Between homework assignments, the subject found time to uncork her theatricality as she plunked piano tunes and yowled duets with her platonic soul mate or tugged backdrops onstage behind more vocally gifted classmates. In college, joining the equally American Asians of the Vietnamese Students Association and the unabashedly nerdy pursuits of the Quiz Bowl Club made her more willing to share those colorful, jagged, uniquely patterned pieces of herself and connect with others openly. During a November hiatus from researching graduate schools, she released her wildest fiction ideas and surpassed National Novel Writing Month’s 30-day, 50,000-word challenge with 60,937 words almost a week early. The subject increasingly valued and delighted in who she was, not just what she methodically planned to become.

Even at work rather than play, her aspirations transcended success for its own sake. Classes in literature and film indulged her narrative impulse; courses in astronomy, religion, and jazz fertilized her fantasies. Wishing to project thoughts and feelings as fully as possible, she turned to the word-image-sound palettes of film and television.

An-Dinh Nguyen
TV Production

From Southampton to San Diego to East Haven, CT, she developed a TV-movie script with the De Hellerman Group, set up shoots for KGTV's Creative Services Department, and manned cameras as a volunteer at a public access channel. And from a *Legal Affairs* business perch, she served as detail-juggler, polisher, and whip-cracker to boost the magazine's "drama of law" explorations.

Soaking up self-made worlds, bouncing over diverse fields, linking souls—those were her kinds of adventures. The subject's discipline did stay strong as she prepared for her next academic mission two summers ago. Despite her stable launch pad, her lifelong fuel proved as volatile and fluid as it was solid and pure.

Destination: Boston University College of Communication. Determination: Boundless. Conclusion: That small-town girl who outgrew parental monitoring is now a big-dreaming woman who ought to be publicly watched.