

NOTE: This was my application essay for Columbia. Not super relevant, but it's a good writing sample and could shed more light on my background.

Have you ever been repeatedly kicked in the face by God? Absolutely crushed to a pulp by the thin, leathery pad on the bottom of his Birkenstocks? Feel the blood pool up in your mutilated face as the Father, Son and Holy Spirit kick your ass with such enthusiasm it would make a blind pacifist cry? Yah, me neither. I'd imagine it's quite painful though.

The point is: **failure** is painful.

And segues are weird.

I started playing ice hockey fifteen years ago with the dream of being an NHLer. I had this fantastical idea that high in the towers of Olympus, locked in the sprawling rooms of divine royalty, God had assembled my voodoo doll with the tender excitement of a toddler in a Build-a-Bear Workshop. I honestly believed he manufactured a hockey beast. That I was set out to wreak havoc on the hockey world like Godzilla on Tokyo. I also believed my thirteenth birthday present would be a letter from Hogwarts though, so I guess I shouldn't be surprised by how this all turned out.

When I graduated high school, I took two years off. I played for hockey teams in Massachusetts, Montana, and New Hampshire at a semi professional level. Uninhibited by school, work or other responsibilities, hockey was my job. I wasn't in the NHL, but I was closer than I'd ever been before. We had workouts, practices, fans, a big coaching staff with trainers and medics. It was essentially everything I had ever dreamed of. There was just one issue: I wasn't happy.

The semi professional lifestyle was a constricting microcosm. Hockey was the only thing that mattered. My value was reduced to the skill at which I slapped a rubber disc around the ice, not if I was honest, or kind, or funny or any of the other barometers by which we measure self-worth. I was in the top 1% of hockey players in the world, but I was exclusively surrounded by the young elite. It was hard to appreciate how far I had come.

The thing is, statistically, only the top 0.02% of hockey players in the world make it to the NHL. The idea that I could come so close, yet fall short, was inconceivable. I spent my whole life trying to be an NHL hockey player and what? I wasn't enough? I was engulfed by this overwhelming sense of inadequacy that I feared would permeate the rest of my life. If I didn't succeed in hockey, something I spent my entire life incessantly pursuing, how could I succeed in anything else? I was a **failure**. And it was painful. It felt like God was swooshing my voodoo doll over a kerosene fire.

You see, for a long time, every misfortune I ever encountered was at the hand of God. I was never religious, but it was so easy for me to blame God for the things out of my control. I'm 5'11, not 6'3: that's God's fault. I'm allergic to gluten: thanks for nothing God. A forest of hair grows on the back of my neck and do you know why? It's because God doesn't want me to have a girlfriend. It was such an elegant defense mechanism, everything that ever bothered me in life had a face and it was God's.

I began to realize how self defeating that was. God is... well... God. Whether He's real or not, He's got better things to do than bully me. He's got a Syrian Civil War to deal with. Not to

mention, the new season of Game of Thrones. The man is busy. The idea that He's following me around all day, sabotaging my McDonald's order, just isn't fair.

In my life (and I want to emphasize, this is just my opinion, you're totally entitled to your own) God is a metaphor. He's anything I want him to be. If I think He hates me, then my life is going to reflect that. It's a self fulfilling prophecy. So what if God *doesn't* hate me? What if God wasn't sadistic and bullying me for self satisfaction? What if he was telling me something? Maybe he was pushing me away from hockey and towards some other avenue of success. Maybe my journey through hockey was just the preparation I needed to excel in some other facet of my life.

The point is: I control how I look at the world. Yes-- hockey didn't work out the way I expected, but instead of allowing that to haunt me, I should embrace it. It's not something to be ashamed of. It's something to be celebrated. My failure in hockey is part of a greater journey. I have a lot more life to live and I have to accept that this failure was part of my progression.

The reason I'm a non traditional student is *because* I've **failed**. I've failed beyond your wildest dreams. I've listened to Coldplay and cried myself to sleep countless times. And not because my girlfriend dumped me (although, she did. I'll always miss you Brittany), but because I followed my dreams and chased what mattered to me. That's what makes me special. I've lived a life beyond school that's helped me realize failure is just success in waiting. Rock bottom is just a platform to jump back up from. And while--yes-- it's cliché, every Nike poster will tell you the same, I've viscerally experienced it. I know what hard work is and I'm excited for the opportunity to apply it to my next challenge: comedy.

Now I'd love to say I was struck with an epiphanic lightning bolt and came out the other side enlightened and unconditionally enthused, but--honestly-- comedy has been more of an idle passion for me (which sucks, because lightning bolts are so much cooler). The thing is, there was never a special moment that truly defined or inspired my passion. Comedy is just something I'm innately drawn to.

And not in the traditional sense. I don't really want a Netflix comedy special. Sure-- a million dollar check would be nice, but television, cinema, late night sketch shows--that's where my heart is.

After high school-- while I was playing hockey in Great Falls, Montana-- I wrote a pilot script for a late night sitcom. It took months to plan out. Developing characters, plot structures, the idea-in-general, then going back and rewriting draft after draft after draft... It was hard. Especially because I had to teach myself. But successfully putting my ideas on paper, slowly carving away excess words and overdone bits, refining the storyline and perfecting each joke's delivery, it was such a rewarding experience. Hockey was rewarding--don't get me wrong-- but it's validation wasn't tangible. I can feel all 56 pages of that sitcom script. I can see the ink and the indents to each new line. I had something to show for my hard work, something to share.

Comedy is a communal art form: you don't tell jokes to yourself. I want to be in a writer's room and bounce ideas off my peers. I want to be on a team--like in hockey-- but working towards a more productive, important and socially relevant objective.

Shows like **Saturday Night Live**, **Late Night With Stephen Colbert**, or **Last Week Tonight With John Oliver**, define public attention. What they decide to air, we decide to care about. They're among the gatekeepers of modern day relevance, a responsibility I'm

enthusiastically drawn to. I want to be a part of that. I think issues like global warming and systematic racism need to take priority in the coming years, but in a way that will productively bring about change. With each year, politics become more polarized and I think comedy is a big contributor. We've started to make fun of people, instead of making fun of the incongruities in their beliefs. We've used comedy to antagonize, instead of using it to unify and enlighten.

At Columbia's School of General Studies, I want to pursue a traditional high-level liberal arts education. I want breadth. I want to take classes like "International and Global History since WWII" and "Cold War Arab Culture" while fulfilling my Global Core Requirements. The overarching theme of my education will be comedy, but I want to take as many interesting, diverse, and unrelated classes as I'm allowed, because the more I learn (the more I know about), the more jokes I'll be able to write.

Columbia's School of General Studies is perfect for me, because I'm not looking for the traditional freshman year experience. I'm looking for a place to hone my talents and develop my comedic voice. I'm looking for an educational environment that doesn't make me feel out of place. As a 21 year old freshman, I want to feel challenged, inspired, and mentally stimulated. I'm not confident I'll find that at another school surrounded by 18 year old freshman who just came back from prom.

At Columbia, I'd be in the very hub of cultural relevance: New York City-- not-so-coincidentally home to the very shows I was talking about (**Saturday Night Live**, **Late Night With Stephen Colbert**, and **Last Week Tonight With John Oliver**, not to mention countless comedy clubs and theaters like **Comedy Cellar**, **Gotham Comedy Club** and the world famous **Upright Citizens Brigade**). I could work an internship at one of the big studios, join Columbia's Fruit Paunch improv troupe, take part in Columbia's Alexander Hamilton Society, all while taking classes in a broad range of subjects that will ultimately culminate in my Creative Writing Major.

I originally applied to Columbia College because I was under the impression it was the best fit for me. I loved the location, Core Curriculum, rigor and social environment. When I learned about Columbia's School of General Studies, a program for non traditional students that combined all the things I loved about Columbia College into a student body I had more in common with, well... I realized there was an even better fit for me.

I'm not sure what the future holds. Whether I get into Columbia, whether I find success in comedy--I haven't a clue. I am not all-knowing.

But at the end of the day, I always want to take responsibility for my shortcomings. To some extent, that's why this essay sounds so harsh. I *failed*, I **failed**, I **failed**. That seems to be the moral of this story. But, it's not. I promise you, it's not. The moral of this story is that failure is subjective, it's influenced by the social constructs of environment and ultimately defined by personal perspective. In other words, I decide what failure means to me. In my life, failure is a myth. Sometimes things will go unexpectedly. I'll face obstacles. I'll have to make sacrifices and life won't always be easy, but I'll never fail. Because in my life, there's no such thing as failure, just lessons to be learned, stories to be made, memories to be had. I'm not omniscient, omnipotent, or omni-of-any-sorts. I don't need to be to live a happy and fulfilling life. I'm surrounded by an abundance of uncontrollable variables--sure-- but I'm free from the burden of

failure and forever enthusiastic, eager and unimaginably optimistic about the next steps in my grand and long journey.