

Personal Essay Examples for College Application

I sit in a hot SUV winding its way over a bumpy African road, a scarf protecting my nose and mouth as dust streams in through the window. Returning from a teaching session with the Maasai women, the other students' excited chatter dances around me as they discuss our invitation to the Maasai coming of age ceremony. The ceremony centers on the circumcision of pubescent males and females; often performed with a sharp rock and no anesthetic. It is a rite of passage for the Maasai. My stomach is a tight knot, picturing the children we met today and imagining the painful procedure they will soon undergo. The other students, excited about the feast and intricate costumes, hope that accepting the invitation will strengthen our bond with the community. I, however, am weighed down by a profound sense of unease when it comes to the main attraction, the circumcisions. Further, the leader of the organization is absent; should she not be consulted? Do I go along with the group, and participate in something that I am morally opposed to? Or do something about it?

For me, the strength of a person's character is defined by their ability to act on their values and stand up for what they believe in. Having strong moral values only becomes a powerful agent of change when one is willing to follow through on them with action. Situations, such as this one, where I feel a sinking sensation deep in my gut, help to cue me to conflicts with my own values, prompting me to gather more information, thus taking the first step towards informed action.

In this situation, the knots in my stomach came from being asked to participate in the celebration of female genital mutilation; a practice which is decidedly against my personal values of reducing human suffering and promoting women's rights. My visceral reaction came specifically from the idea of watching while doing nothing to intervene. Further, I worried that, as students, our group would be woefully ill-equipped to navigate the nuances of the situation, potentially resulting in harm to our relationship with the community. Plus, due to our association with a medical organization, our presence could be mis-interpreted as an endorsement of the safety of these procedures. With the potential to do harm and without an actionable plan in place for stopping genital mutilation, I concluded that I could not, in good conscience, attend the ceremony.

Though I had decided that I could not go, I still felt concerned about the potential impact of the group's attendance, and wanted to gain more insight into the situation before deciding on a course of action. I shared my concerns with my partner and another student. My partner agreed with me, and we decided to consult his physician father. We quickly learned that Canadian physicians are not legally permitted to condone female genital mutilation, meaning that our attending the ceremony could have legal ramifications for our physician-run organization. With this information in hand, I knew I had to contact the organization lead about the excursion. She forbids our group from attending, requesting that I inform the other students, who were obviously disappointed that I had 'gotten the trip cancelled'.

Though I believe my course of action was the right one and I would not change the outcome, looking back, I wish I had voiced my concerns earlier; it may have made the end result easier for

the other students to swallow. In spite of this, being honest when expressing my discomfort with a situation and choosing an alternative course of action that is aligned with my values has never led me to make a decision that I regret. Though standing up for what you believe in, and doing what is right, is not always easy, it is always worth it, and arguably the only way of living a life without regrets.