

## Band-Aid Art

### College Admission Essay

By Alison Shapiro

The biggest shelf in my living room is stocked with upwards of two hundred boxes of band aids. Not just standard issue beige Johnson & Johnson, either - we've got silver glittery ones, glow in the dark ones, neon pink spongy ones, ones, and waterproof ones, in every imaginable shape and size. Visitors to my apartment approach the shelf with cautious curiosity - they want to ask, but they're afraid it's personal, a medical thing. Does my family just get hurt a lot? "What are all those band aids... *for?*" the brave ones ask tentatively, and then recoil slightly, as if almost afraid of the answer.

I shrug. "My mom uses them for her artwork," I say casually, as though band aid art is something everyone's mother does. When this is met with a blank stare, I show them my favorite piece, which uses band aids of the neon pink spongy variety and strange black gauzy tape, along with some oversized safety pins stuck through tiny plastic babies. Suddenly, there are more important questions than band aid related ones: "Where on earth," asks the astonished visitor, "did she find those *babies?*"

My mother has been doing weird artwork for my entire life, and when I was younger, I found myself explaining a lot. There was a project revolving around jars of animal fat with action figures posed inside that proved especially difficult to justify. My mom saves everything - shoe polish, corn silk, the lint from our dryer - and every time she starts a new project, it's like she is inventing a new medium. Frequent visitors consider it a given that there will always be some strange, alternative material lying around our apartment. Some even bring stuff to contribute: "Yeah, so like, I was gonna throw this out, but I thought your mom might like it..."

Only recently have I begun to appreciate the effect that growing up around my mother and her artwork has had on me as an artist. When I was and younger, I got caught up in the explanations - I was always trying to "normalize" her art, to make it seem like something all mothers did. But as soon as I stopped explaining and started really *looking*, I noticed something: my mother was making some really unique and amazing stuff. Though we don't share a medium - she does collage and sculpture; I write, draw cartoons, and play music - for me, my mother has redefined everything about art: what I consider art, what I consider cool, how utterly unimportant it is to be considered "normal" and how vital it is to experiment, stretch boundaries, and view everything in life as material. I've always considered myself a creative person, but my mother has caused me to really think about what that means, and that, in turn, has changed both how and what I create.

A case in point: one of the best poems I wrote last year is a sonnet called "Additional Topics in Trigonometry." This poem was crafted out of atypical material (the verbal equivalent, perhaps, of band aids and plastic babies) and my writing process was not what it usually is. I wasn't even trying to write a poem--I was just sitting at my desk, struggling with my math homework, trying to figure out the relationship between polar and rectangular form, and all of a sudden I started

noticing all these great words. Limaçon. Lemniscate. Cardioid. Cartesian plane. They were all right there in my textbook, chapter nine, a chapter entitled “Additional Topics in Trigonometry.”

In the Poetry class I was taking that term, we had just finished a unit on form and rhythm. *Polar, Lemniscate, Cartesian Plane*--hey, that was pentameter!--and though I had no idea what a Lemniscate actually *was*, it sure did sound cool. I gave up on the math homework and wrote a sonnet about Precalculus, leafing excitedly through my textbook for inspiration. Since that poem, I have started seeing the potential poem in everything, from math homework to the S.A.T.s, and I imagine this is how my mother sees the world--every scrap, every toy, every jar, every band aid--it's all just a collage waiting to happen.

My mother has taught me how to think outside the box, color outside the lines, however you want to put it - she's shown me how to stick band aids on a piece of glass and blow people away. That idea is transferable to *any* medium, to any facet of creative life: band aids can be words, they can be pictures, they can be eighth notes in a solo. A visitor comes into my living room, asks cautiously, “What are all those band aids... for?” I know the answer now.

No, we don't just get hurt a lot.

It's art.