Essay One: Personal Narrative - This I Believe

Writing Purpose: For this assignment, you will write a narrative to illustrate a personal belief that shapes your daily life. Telling stories is one of the most common ways we communicate with each other, and sharing personal experience is about more than just you. Sharing can help reveal much larger issues and can help your audience look at the world in a different way. You will perform an informal, oral presentation of this essay to our class. You will also have the opportunity to publish this essay on **http://www.thisibelieve.org.**

Focus: Your belief may not be unique to you, but the way you present it should be personal and individualized. You may begin with a larger, general belief, but you should narrow your belief down to **one story** that describes a particular life experience. Your audience should read your story and see through **active description** how your belief emerged from the experience.

Style: This is a short essay, so you will need to be concise and **choose only the most important details** necessary to describe your belief. You'll want to have a good "lead," a sentence or two that draws your reader in and sets up the topic. You can use humor, or you can take a more serious approach. Think about what style would best reflect your own personality—and best reflect the belief you choose to discuss. *Be sure to avoid lecturing to your audience*.

Process: To begin, *Think On Paper* about your day-to-day life: freewrite, list, cluster, blog, discuss, and read other *This I Believe* essays to generate ideas and answer these questions:

- What influences your decisions, your outlook, and your interactions with those around you?
- What principles guide your life?
- What significant event or person shaped a strong belief in you?

After you've established one belief to focus on, **you will then need to choose a specific, personal story that illustrates this belief and how you live by it**. Be specific. This is an essay that can only be written by you in multiple drafts. Your "I believe" statement should be unique and intriguing. Avoid generic or cliched statements.

Do this:	**Not this:**
• I believe in sleeping in on Sundays • I believe in opening presents on Christmas morning, not Christmas Eve • I believe in the church of baseball • I believe in eating foods I'm told I shouldn't	• I believe in love • I believe in the importance of family • I believe in the power of music • I believe what goes around comes around

Presentation: This essay must be around two pages in Times New Roman 12pt font, double spaced, 1" margins on all sides. Your last name and page number should appear in the top right hand corner of every page. The following heading should appear in the top left corner of the first page only.

Your Name
Prof. Budris
Foundations for College Writing
Day Month Year

Please include an original title centered at the top of the essay. These don't count as original titles: *This I Believe* or *I Believe in* _____.

We will use these criteria to evaluate your essay:

- ____ Your thesis statement explains your belief and guides your essay (I believe in _____).
- ____ You use a specific story with concrete details to illustrate **how this belief shapes your life.**
- ____ Your essay is personalized and unique to you and expresses your own voice.
- ____ Your essay is well organized and your thoughts are developed in an effective manner.
- ____ Your essay is at least two full pages long.
- ____ Your essay shows signs of careful proofreading, with minimal grammatical or spelling errors.
- ____ Your essay follows all required formatting guidelines.
- ____ Your assignment sheet is stapled/attached to the back of your packet.

Additional guidelines are listed in Appendix A, p257 of your *This I Believe II* book. Please keep these guidelines in mind as you start drafting your essay.

You will need a powerful hook to get any reader's attention. The lead is the doorway through which a writer welcomes and orients readers to the idea. You may begin your essay with the statement "I believe...", but might try the following strategies as more effective leads. Choose the strongest opening with the help of a peer or group member. (Note: If you do not begin with your "I believe" statement, it must appear somewhere in the opening paragraph.) Examples of other strategies:

- **Question:** "When was the last time you went without a meal?"
- **Quotation:** (from someone famous or from someone significant in your life)
  "*Be careful* were the last words my father said to me each time I left the house."
- **Strong statement** (that your essay will either support or dispute)
  "If you eat enough cabbage, you'll never get cancer."
- **Metaphor**: "The starlings in my back garden are the small boys in the playground, impressing each other with their new-found swear words. The crows all belong to the same biker gang. You need to know their secret sign to join their club."
- **Description** (of a person or setting): "Michael once mowed the lawns around Municipal Hall wearing a frilly apron, high heels, and nylons, with a pillow stuffed under his sweater so he looked pregnant. And it wasn't even Halloween."