

Step 2: How Did I Get That Way?

You have zeroed in on the 3-5 most important, most fundamental qualities, values, or passions that you would want someone to know about you.

Now: for each item on this “top five” list, ask yourself: **How did I get that way?** What **experiences, relationships, and/or identities** fostered that quality, sparked that passion, or inspired that value in me?

Those experiences might be small or big. They might be a ritual or practice you have repeated on a regular, even daily basis, over the course of years. They might be a once-in-a-lifetime, earth-shattering, huge defining moment. Most qualities, passions, and values develop over the course of time, though--even if they're sparked by a one-time event, challenge, or opportunity--so think about what you did or what happened after that one-time, big experience that allowed you to develop in the way you did as a result.

Take to really think about it and be as **specific** as possible about what has shaped you.

We are fond of using very fateful, “thus it was always written in the stars above!” language to talk about our deepest values and passions -- “I was born this way,” we say, or “My mom says I was dancing before I could walk!”

It's true that we may be born with certain talents or tendencies, but still, something (or someone) else has to happen for those talents or tendencies to develop into something that defines who we are. You need to have encountered an environment, an encourager, a driving force, or an opportunity (or a combination of these elements) to nurture that little inborn spark into a steady, burning fire inside of you. That's where the story comes from.

Here are a couple of examples:

Quality:

Adaptability

Vague and general:

“I've always been adaptable since elementary school”

Specific:

Struggling to adjust to 3 new schools in 6 years

Quality:

Passion for Sustainability

Vague and general:

“I’ve loved nature for as long as I can remember”

Specific:

“Going on hikes with my grandpa along Barton Creek”

Here is an example of a really strong, specific “How I Got This Way” exercise from Gayatri:

Quality, Value, or Passion:

Everyone is capable of positive change (value)

How did I get that way? (can be multiple experiences!):

I grew from someone who resented other women and had a lot of internalized misogyny issues into someone who is now much more secure and confident. Because I was capable of this positive change, I think given time and empathy, everyone is capable of doing the same.

Quality, Value, or Passion:

Volunteering (passion)

How did I get that way? (can be multiple experiences!):

I’ve been volunteering since elementary school, starting with helping out with school events and slowly working my way up to writing grants for my old middle school as a sophomore. Volunteering has been a part of my life since I was a kid (I remember helping my mom with PTA events even when I was 11 or 10 years old).

Quality, Value, or Passion:

Writing (passion)

How did I get that way? (can be multiple experiences!):

I was always surrounded by books as a kid since my mom is an english professor. Because of this, I grew up as a voracious reader, which soon translated into a passion for writing stories. I still remember writing my first poem; I was so surprised at how much fun I was having.

Quality, Value, or Passion:

Leader (quality)

How did I get that way? (can be multiple experiences!):

I have one younger brother. Since my extended family lives in India, my mom, brother, and I would travel there (with my father meeting us when he could get time off). Because of this, I would often have to spend long hours at the airport entertaining my brother and keeping him out of trouble while my mother figured out our travel plans. Once, I sprinted across an entire airport (dragging both of them along) to make a connecting flight we were almost late for.

Quality, Value, or Passion:


Crocheting (passion)

How did I get that way? (can be multiple experiences!):

My grandmother taught me to knit when I was seven or eight. Since she lives all the way in India, working with yarn makes me feel closer to her, even when she's all the way there. I made her a scarf last spring!


You can also check out Maria, Faiza, and Gabriel's "How I Got This Way" exercises by visiting www.storiesofselfworkshop.com/writing_samples.html

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