



Application Essay - Danu Mudannayake

I am undeniably determined. Ever since I was a little girl, I had always wanted a pet cat. Unfortunately, my parents were adamant that we would not be getting a cat due to my father's (rather suspicious) case of asthma, the impracticalities of keeping a pet and the responsibilities it would entail.

'I promise I'll feed it and keep it clean and take it to the vet, all on my own!' I vowed desperately, repeatedly, as a child.

'Sorry, Danu, it's just not happening,' was forever my father's response.

Instead, I was granted endless bowls of goldfish, and even hamsters that fulfilled my desire to be a pet-owner, albeit briefly.

As the years passed, my yearning for a furry bundle of joy never ebbed. So, three summers ago, I embarked upon my quest to convince my parents I was worthy of a pet cat. I knew the odds were stacked against me, but I figured I would rather try and fail than not try at all.

My initial sparse and subtle hints soon grew to daily pestering. But to no avail.

It dawned on me that I would have to prove I could maintain a pet. Thus, the summer break saw a noticeable increase in my work around the house: at any given moment, I was cooking, cleaning, tidying or sweeping. In the evenings, I continued researching all there was to know about cats, from the best type of kitty litter to how to clip their claws safely.

Gradually, with every shiny window and spotless dish, I saw cracks appearing in my father's facade. I felt close to success. There remained only the task of convincing my mother, the notoriously stubborn figure of authority. After also successfully recruiting my brother and sister on my mission to adopt a cat, I knew my mother would eventually come around. By the end of the summer, I had accomplished the impossible: I was to become a proud cat owner.

When the Saturday came that I walked into the adoption centre to pick up Bubbles, the newest addition to the family, I couldn't have been happier. This was the first time in my life that I had devoted myself wholly to a cause and somehow managed to succeed and reap the rewards. In hindsight, I am proud of myself for persevering despite being told 'absolutely not' on so many occasions. I realised then that if I dedicated myself to something, I could achieve even those feats that initially appeared to be completely lost causes.

So, last year - as the fear-inducing 'Higher Education' family talks began - my long-set-aside-childhood plans of studying in the US started to creep back into my peripheral view. I wondered whether this radical idea could come to be, and whether I could once again dare the impossible.

At first, I suppressed ideas of even considering studying in the US. Everyone around me had told me it was 'unfeasible', 'a waste of time' and I'd be 'better off staying put'. It is not in my nature to back down just because I have been told to do so, but I began to downscale my plans when those closest to me were pressing me to see how slim my chances were. Even if I succeeded in gaining a place, I wouldn't be able to finance a US education. My visions of experiencing a holistic American education felt like a balloon flying further away with every negative comment.

There came a point when I had to ask myself what I truly wanted. Sitting alone one autumn evening, with Bubbles purring in my lap, I mulled over my beliefs.

'Was the so-called impossible achievable?' I thought to myself. Looking down at my cat, I felt the same determined fire flare up in my chest. 'Surely you can't say something's impossible until after you've tried and failed.'

The path then became very clear.

I decided to ignore the doubts of my friends and family and, without the fear of failure looming overhead, commenced the journey of pursuing my ambitions. With every information session, college fair and seminar I attended, the concerned comments of my parents began to morph into a quiet understanding that this was my mission.

'Congratulations, Danu', my father said as he hugged me - after I'd announced to him the news I'd been accepted as a Sutton Trust US programme candidate, when he got home from a late shift at work. 'Maybe you were right.'

Sweeping Bubbles into my arms, I sat down to handle the eager bombardment of my family's questions about the opportunities unfolding in front of me.