

Africa has interested me my entire life, and I can attribute most of that to my grandfather's work there, as well as my father's stories about growing up there as a child. I was always dimly aware of Somalia's political distress; I chose it as my topic mainly because I simply wanted to know more.

I first got really excited about my essay while attending a conference on youth in the Somali diaspora that just happened to be occurring near my house. Apart from all of the fascinating and disturbing things I was to read over the course of my research, it was there that I got to give a human face to my topic, and meet people for whom the conflict in Somalia was not merely an interest or even a career (as it was for my grandfather), but rather a matter of life and death. It was sobering, but it gave a sense of purpose to my task that I would not otherwise have had.

For me, I suppose the key to writing my essay was the idea that what I was doing mattered, that what I was doing, in my little way, was genuinely important.