

Nazli's Personal Narrative: Stanford Acceptance (among many)

Back in the day, when I wasn't fifty kilograms and my dad wasn't fifty years old, I would proclaim my kingdom on his shoulders, my chubby legs hanging on either side of his neck, out on our adventures conquering Istanbul past sleep time. We used to hit Istiklal Avenue, the magical *la Grande Rue de Péra*, a 1.4 kilometers long pedestrian street that was once the heart of Constantinople. On Dad's shoulders I used the word "billion" for the first time, albeit with a significantly distorted sense of magnitude, when he asked me to count how many people there were. I got my introduction to projective geometry when I then inquired why the countless number of heads converged to a single point at the end of the street.

On Istiklal were antiquarian bookstores beside crowded cafés, corn vendors settled before neoclassical façades, beggars laboring next to chic boutiques, concert halls competing with the live music on sidewalks. There were intellectuals getting drunk and drunkards shouting political slogans, musicians in protest and leftists singing the *Internationale*, and that vanishing specimen called the *Istanbul gentleman*, walking gracefully in his old-fashioned suit and felt hat. On Dad's shoulders I tried to make sense of people's indifference to the beggar on the sidewalk, wondering who would ultimately "rescue the drowning child." I questioned how one could reach self-actualization when doomed to carrying a cart full of chestnuts from morning till night, but then I debated whether the life of the bureaucrat working at the consulate across was more meaningful than the chestnut seller's. At times when we joined the crowd gathered around a *qanun* performer, I saw how five minutes of casual Turkish music could offer Istanbulites a respite from metropolitan life. Looking up, I imagined how beautiful the view must be from the balconies protruding from ornamented façades. I later discovered that this was precisely what triggered the wild mood swings of Orhan Veli, the unorthodox poet of a no less turbulent culture. With all its charming contrasts, Istiklal became my window to the world.

However, when I grew too heavy and my dad grew older, Istiklal too had changed. With Dad now too tired to walk 1.4 kilometers, and me no longer in need of his shoulders, I studied Istiklal from the ground. Instead of magic, I saw absences: the sloppy cement patches reminded me of the cobblestones that no longer were there, while the confluence of joy and sorrow that used to walk hand in hand was replaced by a homogeneity of frustrations. I learned what gentrification really meant when I stood before a giant shopping mall erected at the very center of Istiklal, a lifeless abomination against the disappearing small signature shops, whose owners were either deceased or displaced. And when I stopped before the run-down sign of my favorite patisserie, a high-ceilinged 19th-century place called *Markiz*, I cried. Not because I missed their *profiterole*, but because I felt my memories were being taken away.

"Things used to be much better in the old times," our grandfathers often say, signaling their discontent with the present more than their fascination with the past. If I had the chance to jump onto Dad's shoulders today, would the view from up there be any different? I doubt it. But it's pointless to speculate on the accuracy of my memories because nostalgia reveals more about the present than the past. For when I cried before that run-down sign, I was lamenting the fading away of my childhood, the evolution of Turkey into a construction site, and the onset of a life I could no longer experience atop Dad's shoulders. I wondered back then, and I still wonder, how ironic it is that us moderns drown in nostalgia and yearn for an uncertain future at once. For we confidently celebrate progress, while secretly fantasizing a return to an idyllic past, just like our grandfathers.

My quick notes over Nazli's essay

1. **Intellectual prowess.** Not everyone can pull this off, not everyone needs to try. Many make it into the Ivy Leagues and into their colleges of choice by writing intellectually more simple narratives that convey their hearts and souls effectively.

2. Her **keen sentimental insights, depth of understanding of the world**--from a young age

3. Her **use of imagery**

"I would proclaim my kingdom on his shoulders, my chubby legs hanging on either side of his neck." (through a child's eyes and current eyes....it works for her)

"On Istiklal were antiquarian bookstores beside crowded cafés, corn vendors settled before neoclassical façades, beggars laboring next to chic boutiques, concert halls competing with the live music on sidewalks." (listing, or enumeratio, of sights that make up the street...a nuanced skill)

4. Ability to express herself with **complex vocabulary**

"Instead of magic, I saw absences: the sloppy cement patches reminded me of the cobblestones that no longer were there, while the confluence of joy and sorrow that used to walk hand in hand was replaced by a homogeneity of frustrations." (as stated already, not everyone can do this...not everyone should try)

5. Her **variations in sentence length and parallel grammatical structures**

"...when I wasn't fifty kilograms and dad wasn't fifty years old."

"..whose owners were either **deceased** or **displaced**."

6. **Tying up ideas and ending with an ironic punch** in the last phrase

"Things used to be much better in older times," our grandfathers used to say.

"For we confidently celebrate progress, while secretly fantasizing a return to an idyllic past, just like our grandfathers."

And you see how this is a nuanced idea? She doesn't give a one-sided and extreme view. She realizes life is complex and complicated, not easily seen through a narrow scope. And it's fine that she doesn't have an answer. The essay shows that she will be okay with figuring things out as she goes...which is also what college is all about.

The whole essay, of course, is about nostalgia...a nostalgia for two lost childhoods...that of her own and that of Istanbul. But, without stating it, she's saying that "you can't stop the clock, and you can't always stop progress." This is, on a deeper level, what I mean about showing vs. telling. She's using these two lost childhoods to express we all have to grow up but we all need to hold on to the great things of our childhoods....Istanbul's fabled past and her own fabled childhood atop her father's shoulders. There's also a nice tacit idea in the background when she brings up the words of grandfathers--her own father is aging, will one day be the age of a grandfather...just as Nazli, too, will one day be the age of a mother...and eventually, a grandmother. But for now.....she's in a transitional phase of life, trying to get into the college of her dreams. (By the way, she's entering her third year at Stanford.)

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