Law School Admission
Writing a Personal Statement

Suppose that the law school admissions committee were to invite you for an interview. As you walk in, you sit down in a chair before the full admissions committee, and they state the following: "We have read your application materials, your letters of recommendation, your personal statement, your vita, and we now have a clear sense of the 'paper you.' However, before we make our decision, we want to know the 'human you.' We are somewhat short of time, so in the next five minutes, tell us about the 'real you' that was not revealed to us in your application materials."

What would you say?

Now, suppose that you had several days to compose your response to that question and that you could read your response to the committee. How would you organize it? What information would you include?

Getting Started:

First, you should think about and gather a set of episodes or vignettes from your life. From among those episodes, select the ones that best exemplify or represent who you are as a person, that serve to distinguish you from others, or that reveal something deep about yourself.

Finding Your Story:

Next, imagine that your life is a novel. You are both the main character and the author of this novel. The story of your life has a beginning, a middle, and an end. Episodes in your life have shaped your character. You have made many choices, and those choices reveal something about you. AND there are motifs in your life's story: patterns, tendencies, and directions.

Writing Your Statement:

Remember that your application is a signal to the admissions committee that you believe that the combined effort of attending three years of law school, passing the bar exam, and practicing in the legal profession is a NATURAL extension of your life's story. But WHY is it a "natural" extension of your life's story? Persuade the admissions committee of that. That is, (and this is where you start your personal statement) VERY briefly tell the committee about three episodes from your life. As you do so, each one should reveal and provide substantive evidence for your claim to have a particular character trait. IN ADDITION, it must be the case that when taken together, these three stories make it EVIDENT that legal training IS the next logical step in your life's story. IF your life's story does NOT naturally lead to law school, then you may need to reconsider your decision to apply.
The conclusion "therefore, you should admit me to your law school" should remain implicit but should be an obvious implication.

**Critiquing Your Work:**

Check the tone, pacing, hooking the reader's attention, etc. Do not end up spending more time describing the scene than you do talking about yourself. Ask the question, “Does this statement tell the committee more about ECU or about your parents than it does about you?” The committee needs to be reminded that this statement is about you, and it needs to reveal your thoughts, your feelings, your reactions, and how life events have shaped and impacted you. The more you can describe your inner thoughts, the better. But it is not enough to say, "I'm a very caring person." You need to provide evidence of this trait. You do this by telling a story.

When I was a kid, I played with the handicapped kids in class when others ostracized them. This pattern persists in my life and reveals that I am a caring person.

Once you see this difference, you understand what you need to do. Then it is only a matter of selecting what is true and central about yourself (a genuinely difficult soul-searching activity and process – that usually involves tears) and finding (remembering) the appropriate vignettes that reveal and substantiate the claimed virtues.