

This was submitted with my application to
UGA for graduate school (and it's good).

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Statement of Purpose
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I'm going to start off by saying that it probably wasn't the best idea to not give me any specific guidelines for this piece. You know how when a teacher would assign an essay there'd always be those students who had to immediately ask how long it had to be, essentially telling the professor that they'd prefer to do the absolute bare minimum so as to not waste a single minute that could be spent playing Playstation? That wasn't me- I have an Xbox. No, actually I was the one who would e-mail the teacher as I reached page 23 of a paper that was supposed to be 8-12 pages and ask if that was going to be a problem. In hindsight, I probably should've sent that e-mail around page 18 or 19. But hey, when you're in the zone you're not thinking about the professor getting bored while reading your insanely long paper- the whole point of being in the zone is that you don't have to think about those sorts of things. Look, all I'm saying is that I take no responsibility if your server crashed when you downloaded this essay. Okay, now that the disclaimers are out of the way, we may begin (but please don't expect an amazing segue to the next paragraph).

I don't think I buy into every film in history's claims that we're all here for a specific purpose. My purpose in life up until this point, by which I'm referring to high school and beyond, has been to figure out what I'm really good at, what I really enjoy doing, and thinking up a way to make a living by combining the two; sadly, thus far I haven't found a way to make eating at Firehouse Subs and playing *Guitar Hero* profitable.

Since I'd been pursuing medical school you could argue that my purpose was to help others, which just happens to be something I'm both good at and enjoy. Writing is another thing I'm good at and enjoy, but it was always more of a hobby- something that I did because I was good at it and enjoyed it, just like my brother with his "baseball." He's good at it, and he enjoys it, but it's not like you can take baseball and make it into a career. I just hope that leading Georgia Tech in home runs last season and being approached by pro scouts doesn't convince him to drop his pursuit of whatever major they have set up for the athletes at Tech for dreams of living out my old dream of playing professional baseball.*

*49 words without any punctuation- a new record.

But if my brother does have something going for him it's that he's been playing baseball his entire life, so maybe he knows what he's doing. I, on the other hand, have only been considered a promising young writer with Dave Barry potential since I first made that claim back in high school, and then again last week (and twice this morning while waiting on a bagel in the toaster).

High School and JAG Re-runs

Here's where it all began. My junior year I took AP European History. It was taught by a former Navy Captain who tended to digress, and at times was much more interested in talking about JAG re-runs than teaching history. This was fine as I was in favor of not talking about the latest *-ism* that was getting people killed left and right in 16th century Europe. Of course, now my *TiVo* is loaded with shows from *The History Channel*. Who knows, maybe JAG re-runs are the key to inspiring students' interest in history ten years later (according to MSNBC there's an earmark for that study in the new stimulus package).

To make up for lost time, and to make his job easier, the Captain would have us do "Unit Reviews" for every chapter. The reviews always had the same 10 questions and covered enough material to ensure

that since he was likely to forget to do it himself, one way or another we'd be exposed to the information certain to be on the AP exam.

The 3rd question, or “#3,” was the one that allowed the students to get creative. For the first unit review, I wrote a short narrative of a man during his typical day in that time period. Apparently it wasn't too shabby as my teacher sent it to his history professor from college as proof that he'd done something right. Sadly I was too young at the time to be nominated for a Pulitzer. However, after a few creative, hilarious, and brilliant #3s (in that order), Captain Krim, or CK as we used to call him before the Calvin Klein lawsuit, fell in love with my #3s and told the newspaper staff I'd write them an article about a typical day for a student at our high school. I didn't think much of it. I'd assumed he was just trying to get attention- you know how those history teachers are, always bringing up drama from the past to get people to listen to them...

After months of negotiating what I was going to get out of the deal, other than pride in knowing I helped give Mr. Krim something to brag about in the Teacher's Lounge, I wrote the article. Again, I didn't think much of it. I just wrote about some of the more comical idiosyncrasies of our high school, e.g. the “ruler Nazis” who would occasionally sit at every entrance to the school and measure the girls' skirts to make sure they weren't too short. The teacher in charge of the newspaper actually changed it to “ruler Queens” in the article to avoid potentially offending any Nazis, but fortunately they didn't change all of them and a single “ruler Nazi” slipped through. Hey, a victory's a victory. And regardless of the school's attempt to use the media to promote their propaganda and portray the ruler Nazis in a favorable light, I was successfully able to create awareness of their crusade against short skirts, something that I felt very strongly about. The rule in the 3-year-old high school's by-laws stated that a girl's skirt could not exceed 4 inches from the back of the knee. After this article I had the notoriety and the support of my fellow male classmates, and together we formed the Union of Students for Skirts' Rights, or USSR. We were as successful in getting the 4-inch mark changed as Georgians have been at buying beer on Sunday.

Speaking of classes I was zoned out in,* my physics teacher was in charge of the newspaper that year and told me my little narrative would be the main article on the front page. I was astonished; I hadn't planned on being famous while still in high school, I'd figured sophomore year of college at the earliest. Although, if you can believe it, a copy of that paper still hasn't sold for over \$0.38 on *eBay*, or to anyone other than my mom, but God willing, one day I'll break the dollar barrier.

(*Disclaimer- I wasn't actually zoned out in any classes, in fact I did very well. And to prove it, a copy of my high school transcript is available at www.DaveBarryWannabe.com)**

(**Disclaimer disclaimer- if that's actually a real website I swear I'm not being sponsored, it was just supposed to be a joke)

When it came time to go to college I had no idea what I wanted to do. Sure, I was good at learning stuff, but that doesn't translate into a paycheck in four years. Besides, before I could worry about that, I had to worry about where I was actually going to go to school.

Choosing a College

My high school had 400 people, and my parents and I agreed that a big school with over 15,000 girls in my age range could've potentially become a distraction to my academic goals. Obviously my parents had more faith in my “game” than I did, because the way I was looking at it, if there are 15,000 girls then I should be able to get at least one to go out with me. But alas, educational pursuits won out (and that one girl said 'no,' anyway).

Before I decided on Birmingham-Southern College, which boasts about 1,400 students at any given time, I attended their Honors Day to fight for some scholarship money. What's funny now, and what will be to you by the end of this Statement of Purpose, assuming it does end at some point, is that I told the two men who interviewed me that in five years I saw myself as a writer similar to Dave Barry. At the time I hadn't decided on med school and really did see myself going in that direction (a.k.a., the direction I'm going in now, 8 years later).

Then, when I had to write an essay, I chose the topic that had something to do with elementary school and what we should be teaching our children. I can't remember what the topic was exactly, but it was undoubtedly the funniest Honors Day essay of all-time; who cares if the *Associated Press* only ranked it at #4. The one thing I do remember is posing the question, is it really worth lying to our children about George Washington's wooden teeth simply to preserve the mythical memory of our country's first president? I proceeded to answer that question as ambiguously as possible for the next 20 pages. I was later told that if they were to deny me scholarship money they would've been morally obligated to read my essay in its entirety- I was given the Presidential Honors Scholarship (i.e., 10% off my parking decal and a coupon for \$2 off a large sandwich at *Subway*. And half my tuition).

College

The first semester of my freshman year I took Calculus II, effectively ending my interest in math as a major, a couple of history courses, and an intro biology course. And yes, this is relevant.

One of the history courses was, of course, European History, taught by a professor who had to have been Jon Stewart's identical twin brother. Like all European History teachers that I've ever known, he had us do something similar to CK's "#3," only he called it a "megafact." These didn't have any standard guidelines, and like this essay, left the door open for me to make hilarious comments that aren't even remotely necessary to tell the overall story, they just make it much less painful to read. I wish my professor really had been Jon Stewart because when he handed back my megafacts he always made a comment regarding how funny I was, and it's a widely known fact that if Jon Stewart thinks you're funny then you're set for life (and now *The Daily Show* theme song is stuck in my head, great...).

In fact, he (my professor, not Jon Stewart) would compliment my megafacts so often that it almost gave me the confidence to talk to the twins who sat a couple seats down, but, and I've never told anyone this, my greatest fear in life is that I'll be dating a girl with a twin and kiss her sister by mistake- I've never been rejected going in for a kiss and I don't want my streak to end on a technicality! Okay, so maybe I exaggerated- that one is 3rd behind death and public speaking, but it's a valid fear nonetheless. And there was a similar situation on *Friends* when Sean Penn mistook Phoebe for her twin sister- if that doesn't give my fear credibility I don't know what does. And I may have also exaggerated on the "never having been rejected" comment as well, but that's not really relevant...

Believe it or not, a weekly megafact in freshman European History didn't jumpstart my writing career. In fact, I started to get into biology. Then, after that semester I started waiting tables part-time, and that's how I discovered that I loved interacting with people, helping them, serving, getting phone numbers from customers... okay that only happened once, and it was because she wanted me to join her church, but it still counts! So helping people and biology, I'd done it- I'd found something I was both good at and enjoyed.

But despite being in like the 94th percentile in the writing section on the MCAT, I didn't get into medical school right away. You heard correctly- I didn't get a 31, I got a 31R. Ever hear an MCAT score with a

letter? Nope. Everyone plays it off like the science sections are more important, but it's really because they're too embarrassed. Sometimes I just tell people I got an 'R' on the MCAT, and then I might throw in that 'Q' is supposed to be the highest but I did so well they had to make an exception. I'm just kidding. I mean come on, seriously, who would make a test and have the highest grade be 'Q'? That's just ridiculous.

The Plagman Daily®

Not getting into med school right away gave me time, and when I have time, I work. And when I'm not actually at work but have time, that means I need to find some work, which can even include creating my own newspaper, hence the most recent subject heading. An interesting sidenote- it used to be *The Plagman Tribune*®, but I got tired of people confusing my paper with *The Chicago Tribune*. Not because it lowered my credibility, because people kept criticizing my management of the Chicago Cubs franchise.

But anyway, this is how *The Plagman Daily*® got started. When I was waiting tables right after college, a bartender decided to do something fun with the staff and made a list of superlatives for everyone to vote on. When the list came out, I took all of the "Most Likely to ____", wrote an article for each one, and using Adobe PageMaker turned it into a newspaper. For at least a week, the entire staff spent every free moment going through *The Plagman Daily*® page by page, and rightly so as it was probably the funniest thing any of them had ever and will ever read.

When I was working in an HIV research lab I did the same thing- same result. My boss' boss (that's right, not just my boss, *his* boss!) told me I needed to be in Hollywood- not surprisingly I asked him to write one of my recommendation letters. These projects, so to speak, took an insane amount of time, but it was fun! And they made people laugh. I should also point out that I have an incredible eye when it comes to editing and doing layouts, so if I hadn't worked so hard to make them look like a real newspaper then maybe it wouldn't have taken quite as long...

(I've included the front page of both of these "newspapers" with this, and they're completely unchanged from when I first made them. Keep in mind they were written for a very specific audience so there are a lot of inside jokes, e.g., Dr. Ansari's retirement is funny because when a former employee of his applied to Emory's med school they called and asked him why he didn't give a recommendation for his own employee; this employee was so terrible that Dr. Ansari told them if he got accepted to Emory's med school he would retire)

"Publishing" Online

Somehow, possibly while sitting in front of the computer on a Friday night, I discovered this website that allows you to get paid for submitting articles. I began by writing about anything I could satirize. I did a "MySpace Dating Guide" and a series on "How to Drive" (which I'm expecting to become the standard in Driver's Ed classes), each with 8 or 9 articles covering a different topic each time. I even did an "American History" series, going from the days of colonization to the Spanish-American war in 1898, providing my insightful commentary, of course.

Then I resorted to writing about what I know. Health topics were good ones, such as the common cold, several anti-smoking articles, how losing weight combats obesity, and having just read the cover story of a *Cosmo* that morning, a guide on how to rock your man's world (which everyone already knows is by learning to play first-person shooters on *Xbox360*). At one point I even wrote articles explaining the Bowl Championship Series (BCS) in college football, you know, the thing that uses computers to rank teams and takes the place of having playoffs? It was longer than Obama's new stimulus plan proposal and I still wasn't able to finish explaining it. What a waste of a November.

So I was reading the news one day, i.e. it was the only time in documented history that there were no re-runs of *The Simpsons*, *Friends*, or *Seinfeld* on TV, and I noticed something that I'd only ever noticed a million times before on *The Daily Show*- the news can be funny!

But then I realized I had two problems. First off, I didn't have a lawyer on retainer in case I got sued for re-writing someone else's news story. Second, I wasn't interested in re-writing anything, I was interested in satirizing, and that's what I did. A convicted murderer in prison sues the state demanding they pay for his sex-change operation? A high school in rural Georgia has their first ever integrated prom?? A woman uses her baby as a bat to attack her loser boyfriend??? The articles might as well have been titled, "Nick, you MUST mock this story!" And as would anyone reading a story in which the headline is giving you a command, I did. To clarify, I wasn't writing an opinion piece in which I point out how silly it is to impose a "touching ban" at a middle school, I was re-telling the story in a much, much more interesting way, i.e. with dry, satirical humor. Here's an excerpt from the "touching ban" article:

"Hal Beaulieu, whose last name has a vowel-to-consonant ratio of 3-to-1, was given a warning for putting his arm around his girlfriend's shoulder at lunch. What normally would have only warranted a demerit, Hal was told that repeated infractions could lead to detention, and that if he were caught rounding second he could risk being suspended."

Or this one, from an article I wrote after a federal appeals court dismissed an ACLU lawsuit that was challenging Bush's domestic surveillance program.

"Last August, Judge Anna Diggs Taylor decided that the program violated not only the 'rights to free speech and privacy under the 1st and 4th amendments,' but also the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act (FISA) that was passed by Congress in 1978 after President Carter wanted to know how his wife was racking up such high phone bills."

And then there was that time when Senator Sam Brownback, while speaking at a Republican Party convention in Wisconsin, used a football analogy to discuss the need to focus on families and suggested that Peyton Manning was perhaps the best quarterback in history.

"The statement was met immediately with boos, groans, and a few confused looks from people expecting Brownback to continue his discussion on zone-blocking schemes. As Brownback's campaign manager informed him of the Wisconsin state law that prohibits positive comments from being made about any non-Green Bay Packer player, the Kansas Senator attempted to salvage any support he could from both of the people who hadn't stormed out in disgust."

In case you need a little background to this story, then Packers quarterback Brett Favre was the 2nd most worshipped god in Wisconsin behind *Fromago*, the god of cheese. To blaspheme Favre was a felony and carried with it a 4 year ban (Favre's jersey #) from Lambeau Field.

I don't know why Brownback apologized, Peyton Manning will go down as the best quarterback in history- if those Packers' fans can't be unbiased for two seconds that's just sad. Clearly his campaign manager convinced the Senator that appeasing Packers' fans was more important politically than upsetting Colts' fans in Indiana. I'll never understand politics...

But the point that I originally set out to make was that you can get the information you need AND be entertained at the same time, just like *The Daily Show*- it's win-win! And if I could also get paid to do that, that'd be what we call in the biz win-win-win.

But it was still just a hobby. Sure I'd written tons of amazing articles that were loved by everyone able to find them on the internet, and sure I wrote a book in 2007 that's over 85,000 words (that's 186 pages in Word, single-spaced) and was read straight through by my biggest fan in 4-5 hours, but all writing had ever gotten me was \$800 over several months from that website and a stint as an intern on my favorite radio show. And with that, we're finally moving closer to the present- I thank you for your patience thus far.

Nick the Intern

I know it's probably controversial, but yes, I was an intern for *The Regular Guys* morning show, the most fired and re-hired morning show in Atlanta radio (I can't take credit for that line, they have it on their website).

When I first came across the idea of interning for them I thought it'd be a fun thing to do. They started me out working on editing various audio and video projects, but as the workload for the personalities on the show increased I got an opportunity to take a stab at writing jokes for the sports report. I don't know if they were humoring me at the time because they knew I wanted to write, but turns out my jokes were actually well written and funny. And once I learned not to write four times more than I needed (a skill I've apparently forgotten since then), my jokes were being used daily.

Shortly thereafter, the host of the show asked me if I wouldn't mind writing commentaries for the news stories. The night before, they'd send me the links to the stories they'd be covering the next morning, I'd write some humorous observations or my take on the story, and any that he liked he would use on the air as if he'd thought it up on the spot all by himself. I'd originally planned on isolating the audio every time something that I wrote was used on the air, but it ended up being so much that I couldn't keep track.

After they realized that I had talent, anytime something needed to be written I was given the first crack at it. Scripts, PSAs (public service announcements), trivia questions- anything and everything. Completely on my own I came up with an idea for a *Regular Guys Reference Page* so people who didn't get their inside jokes and other references could be brought up to speed. "Peteetong," for example, is a word made up by a caller several years ago that *The Regular Guys* have turned into a greeting, but new listeners hear it and have no idea what the guys are talking about.

"Aunt Louise-y" is another example. Because he had an Aunt Louise who would constantly correct him as a child, anytime one of the guys on the show corrects Southside Steve he accuses them of "getting Aunt Louise-y" on him. These are things the listeners must know in order to get the full Regular Guys experience. I wrote entries for dozens of references and submitted them to the person on the show in charge of the website. The next day I received a forwarded e-mail from the show's producer, who had received an e-mail from Larry, the show's host, which stated verbatim, "Whoever did the reference page is a genius. The writing is really good. It's got the right voice and tone. I look forward to seeing the entries expanded as time allows."

Now, I know *The Regular Guys* have a reputation, so I do want to take a second and distance myself from that part of the show. I think *The Regular Guys* have an unbelievable talent for making anything

funny. For instance, last year I asked Larry (the host) before the show if I could say happy birthday to my mom on the air. My thought process was, given that I do 2-3 hours of work each night helping him write jokes, which is more than any other intern in history has done (unpaid internship, by the way), it's not too much to ask for 3 seconds to do something special for my mom who is an incredible woman. He of course had no interest in letting me use his air time for my purposes, which I accepted immediately and gave it no further thought. But as soon as the show started he spent 15 minutes chastising me for asking such a thing; I knew it was just comedy so I didn't take it personally. In the end they let me do it, and overall that day got about 25 minutes of comedy from a simple question that took 8 seconds to ask at 5:30am that morning. When my mom called in and I said, "happy birthday, mom," and she replied, "thanks, Nick," there was a short pause, and then an explosion of laughter, the point being that what had transpired was in no way entertaining (which made it hilarious), thus explaining Larry's lack of interest in letting me do it. I, of course, knew that they could make it funny (i.e., make fun of me), and they did, thus proving me right, but wisely I kept that observation to myself.

That was the extremely condensed version, but the point is they're a funny group of guys.

Basically, I'm a fan of the parts of their program that are like *The Daily Show*, which obviously appeals to a very wide audience. But imagine if *The Daily Show* started interviewing adult film stars- even if it was only 10% of the show, people would stop watching altogether and would thus miss out on the 90% that was hilarious.

Summing It All Up

I know I've been modest up until this point, but I have to suspend the humility for a second. Other than my liberal use of hyphens and the occasional run-on sentence, I consider myself an excellent writer with a lot of potential. I compare my situation to *Top Gun*. In their first meeting, Viper says that even though they're the best fighter pilots from across the country, "we'll make you better." So there you go- I'm totally Maverick. And you remember what happened in the movie?* Goose died and Maverick lost his nerve- my point exactly.

*If you haven't seen *Top Gun* I don't feel bad for providing that spoiler. It came out in 1986, you've had over 22 years to see it!

I'm just kidding. My point was that I consider myself a highly talented natural who writes "on the seat of his pants- totally unpredictable." Sorry, that was a line from *Top Gun*, too. I could seriously do this all day, so I'll just go ahead and drop the analogies- I'm a talented writer but I need formal training to reach the next level.

I've gone back and read that initial article in high school that was put on the front page, which was easy to do since my mom had it framed (no joke), and I'm pretty embarrassed by the quality of it. Obviously, given that I was a teenager, in high school I thought I knew everything, so at the time I'm sure I saw nothing wrong with it, but by comparison to my work now it's a joke.

That having been said, I can only imagine how good I could be with a graduate education in journalism. My stint with *The Regular Guys* showed me that I can be happy writing for a living- I wasn't being paid or getting any credit and I still enjoyed it immensely. I'm sure I'll have to pay my dues and write what other people want me to write for awhile, but once I get the opportunity to become the next Dave Barry I want to have the background and education to take full advantage.

It may come as a surprise, but doing bench work in research and clinical labs doesn't exactly provide one with many opportunities to write. But if it did you'd better believe that would've been the funniest issue of *Scientific American* ever! Well, except of course the June '96 issue- I don't know who taught that sign-language speaking chimp to curse but that was classic!

All joking aside (although I make no promises), I tried the med school route and it didn't work out. I just wish they could've been a little less cliché with the rejection. I mean, come on, the "it's not you, it's me" line? Really? At least they could've told me they were moving to Fiji or something, which is actually kind of funny because I've had a few ex-girlfriends who really did have to move to Fiji- I never realized there were so many jobs for grade-school Spanish teachers over there.

When I first decided on med school, I convinced myself it was the only profession that could satiate my interest academically and be rewarding enough to keep my motivation this high over a long period of time. But lately I've been remembering how great it felt every time one of the Regular Guys used my material and made people laugh. And I remember seeing the comments under articles I've written from readers who said they literally could not stop laughing.

And it's not just comedy. The first science paper I ever wrote in college was in *Cellular and Molecular Biology*. During the lab portion I was having a tough time following what we were doing until it came time to write the paper. I did the background research, figured out what the data meant, and then finally was able to put it all together and see the big picture. After I wrote the paper, since format was a nice chunk of our grade, I asked the TA to read it through to see if I'd done everything right, e.g. labeled the graphs properly, cited correctly, etc. When she gave it back to me, she admitted she had absolutely no clue what we'd been doing that month in lab, but after reading my paper she understood it perfectly. I know I'm good at breaking things down and explaining them, but still, that was a huge compliment. It's not every day the Teacher's Assistant thanks you for filling her in on our lab's experiment to determine if the cholinesterase in horse serum was acetylcholinesterase or butyrylcholinesterase based on its enzymatic activity and LD₅₀ (and yes, even though it was 6 years ago I totally just did that from memory- even I'm impressed).

So that was my unnecessarily long explanation as to why you shouldn't typecast me as only a comedy writer, because I can also write research papers...

At first I wasn't sure if I was going to go through with this given that it's already so far past the application deadline, but ever since I registered for the GRE and submitted my application I've become more excited by the day at the prospect of pursuing this new career path. I don't know exactly what lies ahead, but whether it's earning me a scholarship or winning a contest with the AJC by submitting an article about the time my dad set the grill on fire prompting me to call 911, good things have always happened when my writing is put to the test. I'm still an amateur, though, and I want nothing more than to take that next step and become a professional. I figure until I do that there's no way Dave Barry's ever going to return my calls...