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Ethiopian Heritage College Scholarship (2011-2012)
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Essay Prompt: c.) Discuss the life experience that has most dramatically affected your attitudes.

On Little River Turnpike stands a yellow and unsightly building, with a placard exclaiming "Carneceria." A mix of Korean and Spanish signs prompt a second glance and an obnoxious neon sign blares "Open." Herds of unemployed men stand in the parking lot, adding to the unattractiveness of the uninviting store. The hideous interior, reeking with the smell of meat, surely was enough to turn away the most enthusiastic customer. The unsightly butcher shop was my mother's first workplace in America. Formerly a high school teacher, she had hesitated, because in the back of her mind resided the traditional Korean prejudice against butchers. While no one openly revealed their bias, disapprovals of butchers were evident in the Korean culture, prompting my mother to keep her novel job a secret to relatives in Korea.

About a month after she started her work at the carneceria, the Spanish word for meat shop, the owner offered to hire me as a cashier in the afternoons, knowing I stayed at a nearby library for my mother to finish work. Surely, I was offended by the offer. While I had kept a straight face, I had felt an apologetic embarrassment towards my mother's job. But what prompted me to take on the job was purely money, which I needed desperately for violin lessons, a new violin, and a brush set.

So, embarrassed, I began my job with my mother and two Hispanic workers. Working with Maria and Cinto, at first, was not too pleasant. Everything about them seemed not to fit my definition of co-workers. They wore the same clothes every day, did not speak the same language, only ate tortillas, and most strange of all, seemed not to mind, and even enjoyed, working at a butcher shop. But it was their habit on payday that I was most puzzled about. Every Monday night, Maria and Cinto ran across the street to a Western Union and came back with an extensive receipt with words they could not read. Curious, I asked, through my mother, who spoke a mix of Spanish, Korean and English, what their trips were for. "Money, for my children, for education," Cinto explained with the widest grin.

Rather than buying themselves a jacket for the winter, they opted to send money to their families. Rather than buying meat and vegetables, they opted for inexpensive tortillas. Rather than complain about their state in life, they opted to be thankful for what they had. I, who prided myself for being educated, felt ashamed and small. With the little money they earned, they used for their children's education. While I was receiving a world-class education and prided myself for excelling in physics, my knowledge of the world was too shortsighted. What I learn in school is limited; Cinto and Maria seem to have learned without any school what the most important things in life are and how to hold on to their dreams. So now when friends ask about the abnormal abundance of meat present in our refrigerator, I proudly claim, "You didn't know? I'm the butcher's daughter."