

**EVAN ROSENMAN – “CREATIVITY, FAMILY, AND TOILET
PAPER: A JOURNEY”**

It stands about ten feet tall, towering over everything else in the front hall. It is covered in streaks of blue, tan, and white, and its ominous tentacles reach out in every direction. It is the stuff of an interior decorator’s worst nightmare.

I refer, of course, to the sixteen-inch-diameter rope of entwined toilet paper that has been suspended from the second floor of my house for half a decade. Yes, you read that correctly. Toilet paper.

The creation of this veritable totem pole of hygienic glory began in seventh grade. On the day the project started, I was grounded. Frustrated at being forced to stay in the house, I unrolled a spool of toilet paper and hung it from the banister on the second floor. Soon, I had used up every roll in the house and had begun weaving them into a compact rope.

After that day, I periodically added to the rope until, eighteen months later, it had swelled to its current dimensions. The ever-expanding “sculpture” – as my mother called it, after she recovered from the initial shock – gradually became a fixture in our house. It no longer seemed out of place, juxtaposed against the polished banister, mauve carpet, and angular coat rack that surrounded it. Rather, it added character to the room, and, reciprocally, the room characterized it. Only when guests visited, gawking at the massive tree trunk of bathroom tissue, did we tend to notice its presence.

Yet, the rope is deeply significant to me. Its “fittingness,” or comfortable position within more austere surroundings, has become an important symbol of my creativity, my identity, and my relationship with my family.

But let me start at the beginning. As the child of an attorney and an engineer-turned-patent attorney, I entered life with little creative guidance. My mother was drawn to math, my father to history, and my older brother to science, all from a young age. None were particularly inclined toward art, literature, or other imaginative pursuits.

I thus spent much of my early life immersed in my family's interests. I listened to my brother excitedly list "protons, neutrons, and ... electrons!" at the dinner table; I paid close attention as my father explained the Battle of Trenton; and I happily did math problems in my head for my mother. I found myself intrigued by these subjects, but there was an oddity in the way I understood them. For instance, it perplexed my parents when I learned the word "tapestry" in grammar school and promptly declared, "Numbers are a tapestry!" My constant need to apply metaphors to science also suggested that I understood those subjects in a somewhat different context.

Then, as I grew older, I developed a strange sense that something was missing. It was an odd feeling, a sort of longing intermingled with random sounds and images rising meteorically in my mind and then fizzling away like a falling star. I could not identify this elusive interest for years, only sensing it as an unfulfilled desire, an unopened window. And then, suddenly, it came into focus when I began to study poetry. Within weeks of first encountering poetry in fifth grade, I devoured volumes of Shel Silverstein and moved on to more grown-up work: Denise Levertov, Billy Collins, Jane Cooper, and Walt Whitman would all become cherished influences. I also soon began to keep a ratty poetry journal, where I wrote wobbly but steadily improving stanzas each week.

The creative person I had discovered would most often wear the hat of a poet. Yet, he would also come to express himself through prose, filmmaking, and, on occasion, toilet-paper

sculpting. And because I raised that creative person from infancy – my parents, while supportive, knew little about nurturing the imagination – my creative soul returned the favor by raising *me* up. Creativity became the outlet for my joy, frustration, and even my sadness.

But my creativity, much like the toilet-paper rope, was not untouched by its surroundings. Rather, it was characterized and defined by them. Thus, the interests my family had passed on to me became intricately tied to my creativity. After all, who could deny the poetic elements of an asymptote – that which is approached but never reached? Or the insight required to understand history, where trends must be extrapolated from mere events? These synergistic ideas became key to my understanding of the world, and for that, I have my family to thank.

The toilet-paper rope's lifespan is now approaching its end; I have an agreement with my parents that the fraying sculpture can finally be laid to rest once I depart for college. But I will always remember the rope for the part it played in the development of my unique identity. My family may have been befuddled by my strange creative streak (an accident of genetics, akin to my dirty-blond hair), but their influence and willingness to support me –even if that meant leaving a toilet-paper rope in the hall – has been a lasting gift.

COMMENTARY

Beginning an essay with a cold opener is a risky move, but this author pulls it off well by pulling it off quickly. The ambiguous, ominous “it” rewards the reader in the next paragraph with his description of a massive five-year-old toilet-paper structure. He builds his essay around this unusual object, using it as a jumping-off point to discuss his personal creativity, then tying it

back in at the end. This is a creative and unpretentious way to tell admissions officers about a trait he possesses.

One weakness of this essay is its length – at over 830 words, it uses a lot of time and space to make its points. He spends five paragraphs setting up the introduction before starting “at the beginning.” He then begins to describe each family member in detail to set up a mold that he will then shatter when he discovers poetry for the first time. However, that revelation comes too late for maximum effectiveness.

The real strength of this piece lies in its voice. The tone is natural and not at all contrived. The author’s voice is authentic, much in the style of an old friend relating a personal story to the readers. For a college application essay, whose primary duty is to convey an accurate and appealing sense of the author’s self, this essay excels at portraying an introspective, easily relatable young man, eager to explore his self through creative venues.

— Helen Yang