

From EH to ENGAGING

Source: from *NYTimes* article “Essays that Worked (and Some that Didn’t)”

#1

EH:

...I had a sudden moment of inspiration. It came all at once. I realized that there was only one thing that I could do that would really make a difference. I had spent hours thinking about it and now, finally, I had hit on an idea....

ENGAGING:

My head throbbed as I closed my eyes and tried to convince myself to give up.

Come on, Ashley. Put the pencil down. Just put the pencil down and go to bed, I told myself sternly. I had been hard at work for hours — brutal, mind-numbing hours. I groaned as I moved over to my bed, collapsing in a pile of blankets and closing my eyes.

I lay there for a moment or two, gathering strength, gaining courage. My tense shoulders began to unclench as I stretched out and opened my bleary eyes...

Suddenly, I bolted upright on my bed, eyes wide, blankets flying. Everything had fallen into place.

‘I’ve got it! That’s it!’ I whooped, scribbling furiously, as my brother pounded on my wall for silence.

...

#2

EH:

...Music changed my life. Though I had always had interests and done well in school, until Nirvana’s “Smells

Like Teen Spirit,” I was never fully inspired. That summer between seventh and eighth grade is when I realized that music spoke to parts of me I didn’t realize were there. ...

ENGAGING:

I strode in front of 400 frenzied eighth graders with my arm slung over my Fender Stratocaster guitar — it actually belonged to my mother — and launched into the first few chords of Nirvana’s “Lithium.” My hair dangled so low over my face that I couldn’t see the crowd in front of me as I shouted, “Yeah, yeah” in my squeaky teenage voice. I had almost forgotten that less than a year ago I had been a kid whose excitement came from waiting for the next History Channel documentary.

It was during the awkward, hormonal summer between seventh and eighth grade when I first heard Nirvana’s “Smells Like Teen Spirit.” The song shocked my senses — until that point my musical cosmos consisted mainly of my father’s Beatles CDs.

#3

EH:

... My parents got divorced soon after I started third grade. It was a tough time. Suddenly I had two houses to shuffle between. My sisters would sometimes stay at my mom’s on Tuesdays while I just wanted to go back to my dad’s. Not only that, but my parents were still arguing. The divorce had ended the arguing in a house and had replaced it with arguing over the phone and arguing through us. We’d spend our visits at one house hearing one parent badmouth the other. I wished that my family was like all of the other families I saw around me. They seemed normal and loving. Instead, I had to deal with homeworks left at my dad’s and lunches forgotten at my mom’s. By the middle of fifth grade it became even more complicated: my father remarried. He met someone who had two children of her own, and before we knew it, we were the modern day Brady Bunch, except my sisters and I were still slipping out on Tuesdays and every other weekend. Family life was complicated and I never quite felt calm or at ease. Home was never what I imagined it should be...

ENGAGING:

... I know the three-mile stretch of road between my father’s waterfront home and my mother’s Main Street cottage like the back of my hand. There are three stop signs, one blinking light, and six houses with white picket fences.

I used to drive this road, from the comfort of the backseat, every Tuesday night and alternating weekends with



my sisters. It was the calmest part of my family visits. Once we reached one of the destinations - my mother's or my father's - the calm *thump thump* of the tires was replaced by the bickering and tension that had permeated our family life since I was eight. Though the drive was short (10 minutes on a Saturday morning, 18 minutes if we got stuck behind a bus on Tuesdays), it revealed a lot of the world to me - both the world of my childhood and the world beyond it....