

Madeline Crow

423-276-4660

mec573

Freshman

As a Mississippi State University student, I will conduct myself with honor and integrity at all times. I will not lie, cheat, or steal, nor will I accept the actions of those who do.

Essay Prompt #1: What are the three little words of the title? Why are they so significant to Ashley and to the story? What three words would be significant to the story of your life and why?

It's a Mutual Decision

Everyone stared at her with eager, expectant, elated eyes. The judge smiled warmly and patiently waited for Ashley's answer. With an unsure heart, Ashley glanced nervously around the room. Phil nodded at her in an assuring, grandfatherly way while Gay smiled with evident anticipation. No one doubted the outcome of this meeting. To all concerned, it seemed like a happy ending to a long, sad story. However, it was not so with Ashley. As the battle raged deep inside of her, thoughts and emotions rushed through the young girl's body. At first there was only remorse and concern thinking about officially giving up on returning to her biological mother as well as leaving her brother in the foster system. Almost as quickly as these thoughts arose, flashbacks of hot sauce, squatting, and laps at the Moss's house took their place. Then, memories of traveling with the Courtiers drifted sweetly to mind. As she debated the question at hand, Ashley was suddenly overwhelmed with fear of the unknowns of staying in the system. With a last sigh, Ashley looked up at the wall above the judge's head and in a barely audible voice announced the three words that would forever change her life: "I guess so."

When one first picks up Three Little Words and reads the short summary on the back, it is easy to quickly assume that the magic three words that will change Ashley's life will be 'I love you.' It seems practically inevitable, considering the story line. However, Ashley's true three little words— "I guess so" —more accurately represent her story. So often, we like to believe that all stories have happy endings, especially stories with orphans and kids in the foster system. We hope that if each child can just find a family that will love them, their lives will be changed forever. Unfortunately, as Ashley's story demonstrates, this is not the case. Children carry with

them the scars of their past. As much as we want to be able to choose them, love them, and heal them, we alone cannot do that. The children have to choose us too. Ashley's three words reflect the beginning of her choice to love and accept the Courtiers into her life. They reflect her bravery and her courage. They reflect her quiet determination to choose to accept and to trust again, two concepts that cannot even be fathomed by those who have not walked in her shoes.

In my life, I do not know if I could pick three words that forever changed my life. However, three knocks on the door changed my life one October afternoon. I remember the day vividly. I was sitting in my room working on my schoolwork when I heard the sound. As the knocks filled the house, my brothers, my mom, and I rushed to the door with uncontained anticipation. When we opened the door, we beheld a smiling, sophisticated young caseworker and a quiet, unsure one-year-old little boy. He held a large balloon in his right hand and the caseworker's hand in the other. Without a word, he followed the caseworker into our home and stood in our living room while we tried eagerly and unsuccessfully to get him to play with us. After a while, the caseworker left him with us for what was supposed to be a night or two. However, as events unraveled, plans changed, and more information was presented, one night has gradually turned into forever. When Xavier first found himself alone without his caseworker or biological mother, he cried and banged his head on our tile floor. Now, at five and a half years old, Xavier is filled with personality, sass, and exuberance for life. He feels completely part of our family, and no one in my family can imagine our lives without him. From the moment he walked in the door, we have loved him as if he was part of our family, despite race, biology, and other people's opinions. However, we are all aware that fostering and adopting comes with its own challenges. At some point in the future, Xavier will probably want to know more about his family. He may want to see his biological mother again, and all we will be able

to do is love him, encourage him, and be there for him. While this is slightly unnerving, Xavier, just like Ashley, will one day have to choose us to be his family too and whisper his own “I guess so.”