

LIZ MURRAY HARVARD ESSAY

*Liz Murray is among the few homeless youth who have made it all the way to Harvard University. Through the memoir, *Breaking Night*, Liz shares her story of her.*

But getting into Harvard was only half the battle. Water was needed "just a few drops from the tap" and so were shoelaces and belts. Recent studies by Miller and others that have been published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* and the *American Journal of Psychiatry*, show that spirituality can protect a person from depression, even if they have a high risk for the disorder. She had never read the paper, but the scholarship seemed perfect. I spent just a few minutes at her bedside, feeling powerless. As she took care of them, many nights staying up with them as they got high, she would not go to school. Amazingly, instead of falling apart, my mother proved to be a sober and houseproud single parent. She becomes a star student and earns a scholarship to Harvard University through an essay contest sponsored by *The New York Times*. The eldest of four children, she was raised by an alcoholic father and mentally ill mother and she had started smoking grass to escape the violence and abuse of her home life. I was just wondering about you and about Ma. She says when she visited the campus with her high school, she decided that attending Harvard was a goal within her reach. I started school in the summer of and, from the outset, I tried to be a good student. *The Times* was looking to make a difference by helping kids who had overcome obstacles. Her reaction to the acceptance letter was to scream with delight. However, within five days, the money would be gone and for the rest of the month, Murray and her sister survived on egg and mayonnaise sandwiches. My time there comes back to me now only in flashes of smells, images and sounds. She took a break in the middle of her studies to care for her father who died in from Aids, aged At school I was clearly different. Ma registered me at a new junior high school. But some of her earliest memories are of her parents spending their welfare payments on cocaine and heroin when she and her sister were starving: "We ate ice cubes because it felt like eating. Their addiction put them, especially her mother, in a fragile state that demanded Liz take on a great deal of responsibility. Her father died in , also of Aids. Had I known that" and had I known how difficult it was to make it to Harvard" then I may never have applied for either the scholarship or my college place. The shame associated therewith caused her to plead with her mother to stay home and, eventually, her mother allowed her to do so. Murray commenced her education in Picturing a homeless teenager not only attending high school, but graduating and making it to an Ivy League college seems highly unlikely. Her story apparently came through loud and clear. But every so often an image of a sick and weary Ma would come into my mind and I would fight to push it away. The two years I spent at Prep unfolded like an urban-academic-survival-study marathon. From the hallway, I heard a woman and a man talking. There seemed to be no future for either of them. Weiner encouraged her to apply to Harvard, telling her that although it was a reach, it was not impossible. Liz explains that as a result, she and her sister were neglected. She reached in her pocket and realized that she had enough money to buy a subway token to an interview or buy a slice of pizza. When he took his top 10 students to Harvard, she stood outside the university and instead of feeling intimidated she admired its architecture" and decided it was within her reach. I cried to her to come back. The scholarship contest required students to write an essay in which they were to describe any obstacles that they had overcome in life to thrive academically. She moved out at 15, figuring it was safer living on the streets than in a home where there was more cocaine and heroin than food on the kitchen table. By the time the early s came around and I'd been born, their disco dancing thing had become a drug habit," she recalls.