

# S/he Had a Life

**Objective:** To write a 200 to 400-word autobiography that illustrates the essence of your life, based on a sample chapter translated to your own life.

## Brief Explanation

S/he Had a Life essay is based on Chapter 28 of *Going After Cacciato*, an novel by Tim O'Brien.

## Pre-writing

Read Chapter 28, *The Observation Post*, from *Going After Cacciato*.

Consider this: In Chapter 28, Paul Berlin, the main character in *Going After Cacciato*, realizes he might not survive the war in Vietnam. He is a young man, barely into his 20s, who in this chapter thinks back on his life and records his own history.

If you were to write your own history, as of today, what would that look like?

## Prompts

What is the coolest thing you ever did?

Have you ever been in love?

How are the most important people presently in your life? Or a while back? How has each of the people impacted you?

What is the toughest situation you've ever dealt with?

3 ways you spend your free time. Provide details on each.

3 things you've done in your life that are memorable?

Write about a time you felt lost.

Write about a time you felt loved or appreciated.

Write about a time that you did something and you felt confident doing it.

When you visualize yourself, what do you see?

Imagine you are watching a movie of your life, what images, moments come to mind?

Why do you think these are important events in your life?

*The Observation Post* chapter and writing samples from students on the following pages.

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## The Observation Post

He did have a history. His father built houses, his mother buried strong drink in her garden. He'd played baseball in summer. He'd gone canoeing with his father. He'd gotten lost as an Indian Guide in the Wisconsin woods. Sunday School and Day Camp. A conscientious student: high marks in penmanship and history and geography. A stickler for detail. He had thrown rocks into the Des Moines River, pretending this would someday change its course, imagining how the rocks would accumulate to form new currents and twists, how large effects might come from small causes. Pretending he might become rich and then travel the world, pretending memories of things he had never witnessed. A daydreamer, his teachers wrote on report cards—standoffish and shy and withdrawn, but these would be outgrown. In high school, Louise Wiertma had almost been his girlfriend. He'd taken her to the movies, and afterward they had talked meaningfully about this and that, and afterward he had pretended to kiss her. He had graduated from high school. Enrolled at

Centerville Junior College, earned twenty-eight credits, then quit. Spent a summer building houses with his father. Strong, solid houses. Hard work, the sun, the feel of wood in his hands, a hammer, lifting and striking and waiting. Cruising up Main Street in his father's Chevy, elbow out the window, smoking and watching girls, stopping for a root beer, then home. He'd become a soldier at age twenty.

Sure, he had a history.

## Untitled

by Robert

He never knew where he was going. He was born in Los Angeles and never left it for more than a moment. He has always tried to make some sense of this place. For thirteen years he let his parents do the thinking for him until the cusp of adolescence he mentally left his parents' solid foundation. From there on he has tried to find a solid foundation: a foundation to grow and prosper. At age thirteen he wanted to become an artist like his father. He bought colored pencils and drawing paper. By the end of that year he gave up. The reason was seeing his classmates in his middle school art class surpass him in ever shape and form. He tried his hand at guitar. He wanted to be a rock 'n roll star. He watched other guitarists in envy as they easily learned songs and scales, while he struggled with the basics. He tried to find a voice in music to help him find a foundation. He was a metalhead. He was a proghead. He was a punk. And he was a Post-Punker. Now on the brink of adulthood he has overlooked his options. The only two things he ever received good grades for and enjoyed doing: history and writing. He hopes this will be his foundation.

# Keep it Together

by Anthony

He had a history. Sometimes he wished he could rewrite it, but that wasn't an option. He grew up in a broken home with a drunk for a father. His parents would fight every Sunday night and he'd have to slam his door shut. It didn't matter, the yelling chased him and leaked through the crevice under his door; ringing in his eardrums.

He had more than that though. He had his afternoon walks in the summer, passing the park and smelling hotdogs and fresh cut grass. He would sit on the upper branches of a tree, staring at the sun as it set over Los Angeles while the warm yet cooling summer breeze kept him company. He'd walk home when it was already dark and everyone was already asleep. He would slowly open the front door and it would creak. He'd close it gently and tip toe his way to his room in complete darkness trying to avoid bumping into a wall.

He had what he thought were the most meaningful nights of his life with someone whose face he could barely remember. He had deep and funny conversations with friends while hanging out and walking around Hollywood down Sunset Boulevard. Lights and crowds flooded the sidewalks and streets. He had the time when he was almost robbed by a guy armed with a knife on the bus at 2AM but he got off when the doors opened and ran as fast as he could. He was running downhill, not sure if he was even being chased and almost tripped into the street. His history could've ended right there if he did, since there were cars speeding right past him.