

## **Topic: (topic of your choice) describe a memorable event**

### **Promise**

The burning incense suffocated me. I could not breathe. Trying to choke back my weak tear drops, I could hardly utter the last promise to my dearest mother.

It was the 28th Tet, 1994 – two days before the Lunar New Year's Eve in Hanoi. I was playing on the balcony when I heard the car. I ran down, hoping this was another time my mother would come back to rest after days of strenuous treatment in the hospital. People were rearranging tables and chairs in the guest room. My mother was lying in the old brownish grey bed. Someone insisted me and told me to go to my mother. I approached her, but was so afraid that I turned back to the stairs where I could observe everything. I felt terrible. I could not, and dared not think of an explanation. Why were they yelling at me, urging me to come down and see my mother; why were others giving me these incomprehensible headshakes? Just the previous week I had visited her in the hospital, reciting my lessons and nursery rhymes for her. She had promised to take me to the ice-cream shop. From the stairs, I could see my mother's extremely pale face. There were pustules all over her lips. Her eyes closed tight. In the films I had seen, death only occurred to elderly people whose children were already adults. But I was only six years old. My sister was eleven months old. I wanted to go to the ice-cream shop; she had promised me.

As the last day of the funeral approached, the air was filled with stuffy incense smoke, and a tense, heavy atmosphere. The loss of one's mother at the age of six is unbearable; it asphyxiated my soul as much as the smoke from the incense that I had to hold in my hands cut my breath short. Yet I did not shed a tear. "Do you promise mom to be a good daughter and a good sister?" my father suddenly asked, carrying my sister. I had to respond. I had to promise before my mother's casket to be a good daughter and a loving sister.

Later, the incense odor lingered as I was frustrated with my Physics grades. I wanted to give up but the promise did not let me. I kept on trying until I got satisfactory results. I was overwhelmed with the busy schedule of a Class Leader and of a bilingual Chinese-Vietnamese student's program. But the desire of being the best daughter encouraged me to stick to my work.

I was doing my sister's hair. She has grown up now. In addition to caring for her health (she had a chronic respiratory problem), I also advised her on growing-up problems. I was exhausted at times since I still had my own teenage troubles. But the incense odor lingered again and kept me in my role as a good sister.

Over the years, that promise in the incense-filled air has become my motivation and encouragement: It has forever strengthened my person.