

Essay – ‘I Wish I Had Listened’

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‘Have you got your mobile phone?’ my mother asked, for about the hundredth time. ‘Is it charged? If it's not you can borrow mine. You do have yours, don't you?’

‘Yes,’ I snapped, leaping hastily from the car lest anyone see me being dropped at the gate by my mother.

‘Are you sure you'll be alright? Promise me that you and the other girls will stay together, won't you?’

Mum meant well, but she always talked to me as if I were five instead of fifteen. Honestly. Did she think that my friends and I were incapable of taking care of ourselves at a music festival? It was on in the daytime, for heaven's sake. What could possibly go wrong?

Although it was mid-July, the weather was more like mid-winter. Rain lashed down, but it couldn't dampen my spirits as I squelched through the mud and towards to the spot where I had arranged to meet Anna and Marie. My mind was filled with thoughts of Coldplay and Lady Gaga, and I couldn't believe I was about to see them and some of my other favourite singers in person. Live! I hoped we'd get close to the stage so that I could take some photos on my phone. Maybe even a video to show those of our friends who hadn't been able to make it. The phone was fully charged, so I might get a longish clip. That would be a great way to remember this, my first music festival.

I reached the meeting place, but Anna and Marie weren't there yet. Never mind, I thought, I'm a bit early anyway. They'd have to come soon, though, because Anna had all the tickets. She was the reliable one, so she'd been put in charge of that end of things. All Marie and I had to do was turn up. And I had managed that. Where were they? I paced up and down anxiously as the minutes passed, scanning every fact in the hope of seeing my friends. It

wasn't easy to see who was who: everyone was bundled up in anoraks and hoodies, heads bowed against the rain. No sign of Anna or Marie. Where could they be? We had said by Gate 5, at two o'clock. It was half past two now.

I decided I'd better ring Anna. Reaching into my pocket for my phone, I remembered with horrible clarity that it wasn't there. It was lying on my bedside locker, charging. I had been so keen to ensure that it was fully charged that I'd thought it was best to leave it there until the last minute. And I had forgotten it. What on earth was I going to do now?

I looked around desperately. There was a small knot of security guards just outside the gate. I approached the nearest one and asked if there was any way I could borrow his phone for a minute. He laughed. 'Sorry love, but I've heard that one before. No way I'm letting you phone your cousin in Australia or whatever you've got planned.'

I tried to explain, but he was already turning away. 'I was supposed to meet my friends at Gate 5 over forty minutes ago!' I wailed.

He turned back to me, frowning in puzzlement. 'Gate 5? Then what are you doing here, at Gate 15?'

I looked up at the numbers over his head. A one and a five. How had I not spotted that earlier? The one was slightly obscured by a flapping poster, and in my excitement I hadn't bothered to look too closely.

As quickly as my wellies and the mud would allow, I headed towards Gate 5. It was right around the other side of the stadium, and time was running out. I had less than ten minutes to find the girls and get in. I ploughed on through the sucking mud, praying that I would be in time. I nearly was. Nearly.

Just as I arrived at the gate, it opened and the waiting crowd surged forwards. Frantically, I shouted my friends' names as people shoved and jostled to get into the festival grounds. I had almost given up hope when I heard two voices yelling my name! There, in the middle of the heaving mass of bodies, were Anna and Marie. Even from where I was standing, I could see Anna waving the tickets in the air. But it was too late. They were almost through the gate and I could see that the security guards were not listening to their pleas to allow me to queue jump, or allow them to fight their way out of the mob of eager festival goers. In an instant, they were swept inside. I couldn't believe it.

Within moments, the only people left outside the gate were me, a few security guards and one or two stallholders. Miserably, I walked back towards the main gate, wondering what on earth I was supposed to do now. Should I just wait here until the girls came back out? I supposed I didn't have another choice. Head bowed, I trudged on, feeling very sorry for myself. And then, miraculously, I heard someone else call my name. I looked up and there, coming towards me, was my mother. I've never been so glad to see anyone in my life.

On the way home in the car, she told me the whole story. She had heard my phone ringing in my room and had answered it. It was Anna, trying to reach me. Mum explained that I had forgotten my phone, and Anna told her how I had not managed to get into the stadium. And that was it. Mum to the rescue.

To her lasting credit, Mum never said a word about my leaving the phone behind. I think she knew that I had paid a high enough price for my stupidity without her having to rub it in. I do wish I had listened to her. Since that day, I have never been without my phone. In fact, sitting here in the exam hall without it makes me feel a little lost. But I know it's just outside the door, in my schoolbag. And as soon as the exam is over, I'll ring Mum and let her know how I got on. She'll be especially keen to hear how I found the essay writing, as I was fretting about it in the car coming in this morning. Mum advised me to write about what I know. 'Be yourself,' she said. 'Just tell the truth.' I was about to snap at her and say that the truth was boring, before leaping out to join my friends milling around the school gate. but I checked myself. I sat in the car for a few minutes more, until she had finished talking. And I listened.