

## **Melanie Preen – Personal Statement**

I have two vivid memories of Tiger, each shaping the course of my life in ways I never fully understood until much later. The first takes me back to National Swim Meet practice when I was 12. Amid the chaos of shouting coaches and splashing water, I found escape in my sketchbook, creating fashion designs. No one noticed my work—except Tiger.

That's how we met. He would wander over, peering curiously at my sketches, asking questions that helped me see my work in new ways. He didn't just notice my creations; he celebrated them. "Draw more," he'd say, his enthusiasm infectious. Tiger didn't just encourage my creativity; he made me believe in my ability to do so.

By 14, Tiger had done more than inspire my artistry—he introduced me to programming and technology. He was always in trouble for hacking the teacher's computer. To me, Tiger wasn't just a troublemaker; he was an innovator. Together, we imagined ourselves as partners in crime, pushing the boundaries of technology.

But life pulled us apart. Tiger moved away during primary school, and we never met again. Eight years later, he passed away—lost to suicide. It wasn't until his death that I fully realized how profoundly he shaped me. Tiger didn't just influence my journey; he formed the foundation of who I am today.

Committing to a path in technology came with some adversities. As one of the few women in high school passionate about technology, I often felt isolated—especially while navigating a hidden disability and the absence of individuals like Tiger. Yet, I have unwavering faith in my ability to change the world, and moments of connection sustain me. Volunteering over 50 hours a year teaching STEAM to minorities and conducting research on machine learning bias by interviewing underrepresented individuals energizes me to create technologies that make a difference.

These interactions instill hope and reinforce my belief that adversity equips us with the empathy and resilience needed to support others. Through my work, I aim to build bridges for others, just as Tiger once did for me.

My journey has been shaped by the places I've called home. Growing up in Phuket, Thailand, I learned from a Buddhist culture to respect nature and approach challenges with harmony and compassion. Later, at the University of Manchester, I was inspired by Alan Turing's legacy and my university's commitment to social responsibility, earning the Social Responsibility Scholar award for my efforts to drive meaningful change. These experiences have given me a global perspective and a grounding in both innovation and humanity—perspectives I am eager to bring to MAS.

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In Tiger's honor, I have adopted the tiger's traits as part of my core values: curiosity and a relentless drive to fight for what is right. At MAS, I hope to create transformative technologies and empower communities through volunteering and teaching across Thailand, the USA, and the UK. Inspired by MAS's researchers, I envision a future where the technologies we create together empower communities and change lives.