Ashley Helfinstein

Ms. Harris

Humanities Period 5

17 September 2015

726 words

Common App Prompt: Discuss an accomplishment or event, formal or informal, that marked your transition from childhood to adulthood within your culture, community or family.

Max Word Count: 650 words

Essay Tone: Anxious and perturbed, then shifted to confident, eager, and reflective to demonstrate my personal growth and transition to adulthood.

A Month to Grow Up

The lost feeling dropped in my stomach and ballooned out of control, taking up all the space, until I thought I would throw up. I felt fear and panic buzzing through my entire body. On my own for real now, I had no clue what to do.

On that first day of the Academic Connection program, I was completely out of my element, floundering for a space in this new world. I attached myself to the group of girls that paraded by me and trailed behind the beautiful RA as she chatted comfortably with the crowd. I fretted over my insecurities, wrapping them around me like a cape.

Later that same week, curled in the corner of the giant, empty, common room of the floor I sat alone with a book, awaiting the beginning of Board Game Night. At the scheduled time, two people entered with the games and began to set up a board game to play together. I glanced around at the emptiness of the room, unsure what to do with myself. I did not have anyone to play with. My anxiety increased as people trickled in from other floors and began to set up games with their friends. My suitemates were all tucked away in their rooms. I had the thought to flee and read by myself in my room, but then I saw people about to start a poker game. Unable to resist the temptation of the games, I joined in surprisingly easily. After a few hands, I settled into the rhythm of the game. Over the course of the night I began to feel comfortable with the group as we transitioned from poker to other card games. As we played BS, I found myself joking with the boy next to me and chatting like I would with my friends at home. I uncovered my place in the group. I was pleased to discover that even on my own, in a new situation, I had my identity.

Interacting with the different groups of people, I began to define myself in the differences between people. Playing Capitalism, Egyptian War, Spoons with my suitemates from China, Texas, Southern California and all over, I discovered our different styles. Card games were our vice. Shiwen was musical, introspective and sweet. Elizabeth was competitive, dryly humorous, and intellectual. Mariana was quiet, generous and passionate about biology. And I was me. I was enthusiastic, kind, nerdily excited to connect my learning to real life. As I discovered my own traits, I felt my confidence growing.

After all the time using my parents as a crutch, it was a refreshing to walk on my own. My terror about going to college receded as I realized that I could be independent. I bounded along the path to the Cognitive Science building. I took in the trees and sculptures in John Muir College and marveled at the back of the Geisel Library as I entered the classroom. I felt strangely at peace in the unfamiliar classroom, as if I had found my place among my class. My mind reeled from the mind-blowing concepts of Cognitive Science flying at me. Having the ability to do such meta things as use my brain to learn about how human brains learn, or practice the words on my tongue as we studied Linguistics was thrilling. It was captivating to spend the time with other passionate classmates expanding the volume of my knowledge as I pushed the boundaries of my independence.

For me, adulthood did not come at my Bat Mitzvah, when I was surrounded by people I knew who supported me and my learning process to read Torah. It came over four years later, when I was surrounded by no one that I knew, forced to become familiar with myself instead. I discovered the dynamic of being with people, alone. I discovered how to interact as an individual, I took complete responsibility for my well-being, and I learned how to learn in a new environment with ample distractions and free time. Now, after this experience, I continue to feel like an adult. My identity manifests in the way I interact with people, and the way I handle myself. My transition was a long time coming, but the catalyst of Academic Connections forced me over the brink into adulthood in a way that affects me profoundly.