

## THE BEST YEARS OF YOUR LIFE

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[Assignment: Write an essay about how your thinking about yourself and a group you belong to changed over time.]

(1) The people in front of me begin inching their way ahead, picking up speed as they go. I follow them, my heart pounding as if I had just finished a marathon; a lump wells up into my throat. Soon we are rapidly filling into the auditorium where our families and friends fidget in the anticipation of seeing their son, daughter, grandchild, or friend, as he or she proudly marches in to be honored. "Pomp and Circumstance" rings in my ears as I survey the view in front of me. My classmates and I look identical in our red caps and gowns. I attempt to keep up with the line which is almost at a jog now and pray I don't trip and fall. Finally we get to our seats and my mind drifts as the speakers talk of future and past, of good and bad. I drift back to our freshman year when we were all strangers, to sophomore year when we were still insecure, to junior year when we took pride in our class, and then to the past year when we had grown so strongly as individuals and yet become so close. I cannot believe the changes we have all gone through in those four short years and I try to figure out how it could have happened so quickly. During those four years, we had seen the same annual events, but each year we saw those events in very different ways. By the time we had passed through freshman, sophomore, junior years and finally come to the senior year, all that had earlier seemed new and exciting had become stale and boring.

(2) I remember how scary and exciting it was to start high school. Finally we would be entering that huge building that we'd ridden our bikes past countless times, riding as fast as we could because of all those bigger, older kids. Now it was our turn to be one of those big kids. After taking a tour of the school all of us secretly prayed we would find our new classrooms on the first day of school. There were high hopes of making new friends and finding a niche there. Maybe there were hopes of being the star quarterback or the top actress or the best artist, maybe just hopes for classes that weren't too difficult and the possibility of a new friend or two. We all came with hopes and expectations.

(3) As freshmen we had an attitude that set us apart. Our new environment was still foreign to us and basically we lacked confidence. Our lost looks, loud giggles, and general confusion revealed our status as freshmen, but these also signified our capacity to have fun. Our parents were constantly listening to the new things that transpired in this larger-than-life school. Our perspectives were fresh, and our freshness made us what we were--young men and women who were excited to try new things and experience life.

(4) We changed as the sophomore year came. Sophomores don't need a tour of the school before classes; they already know the building. They know who the cool people are and which teachers are to be avoided at all costs. And so we felt superior to the freshmen who were so close in age to us, and yet so far apart in attitude. Sophomores are not upperclassmen; yet they are fast learning the ways of high school life. It was hard for us

to know where we fit in. We had not yet fully bonded as a group and we were not yet fully sure of ourselves. Some of us decided to display our new status by harassing freshmen, indulging in time honored pranks like selling elevator passes and directing poor, unsuspecting freshmen to the classroom on the non-existent third floor. Others imitated the upperclassmen's attitude to freshmen--ignoring them.

( 5 ) Junior year was again spirited and exciting. For one, there was assurance that came with knowledge: we knew which teachers to avoid, how to stay on the principal's good side, and which doors to sneak out from in between classes. But our knowledge was as yet unmarked by fear of the future and we still retained something of our innocence. We could still indulge in wild fantasies about college and about the wonderful jobs we would have some day. We had bonded together as a class and this increased our confidence, but only as a group. Alone, we sometimes still lacked self-confidence.

( 6 ) By senior year those fantasies of college and jobs started to fade and the realities of "what am I going to do with my life" slapped us in the face. We seemed more focused on the future than the present. Our common chatter was about which schools we had applied to or been accepted at and what summer jobs we had secured. Actually our attitude to high school was somewhat paradoxical. On the one hand, we were tired of high school and ready to move on. On the other hand, we were reluctant to leave behind what our parents and older friends told us were "the best years of your life." So there was renewed interest in participating in events like Homecoming which we had begun to take for granted.

( 7 ) Senior year we began to achieve true self-confidence. After four years of high school, we began to realize we had grown up and had discovered our capabilities in the process. We had explored different paths and interests. The dreams of being a quarterback or a top artist that we had brought as freshmen had been realized or shattered. But either way, we had found within ourselves the capacity to make some dreams come true, if not the old ones, then newly discovered ones which were more in tune with our capacities and needs.

( 8 ) The noise of applause awakened me from my vivid daydream. The speakers had finished and it was time for my class to receive its diplomas. As I waited and watched the lump returned to my throat. I watched my classmates and friends, all of whom I had gotten close to and grown so much with. During the past four years we had changed together and become a unit. I walked up towards the stage ready to graduate. Finally. So soon. Shawn Marie Weber. I shook the principal's hand and turned to walk off the stage. Glancing over the crowd of red in front of me, I pictured them all as freshmen; it made me smile. We had all changed so much.