THE PRICE OF FREEDOM

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[Assignment: Compare and contrast the nature of high school experiences with college education. While similarities may provide the beginning point, your essay should isolate at least three major differences. Be sure to use similar characteristics in your analysis and place them in meaningful relation to one another.]

(1) The telephone woke me up at 10:30 on Saturday morning. It was my anxious parents, wanting to hear all about what was going on in college. As I told them about classes, parties, and life in the dorm, I was struck by the differences between high school and college. When I made the move from high school to college, I lost the privacy and luxury I had enjoyed at home. I gained, instead, more freedom and responsibility. Both the loss and the gain I now see as necessary dimensions to my rite of passage into adulthood.

(2) When I lived at home I had my own room. Often, when I came home from school, I would go upstairs to sprawl across my bed and be alone. I would put on a favorite record and daydream, content in the knowledge that no one would bother me. If anyone did need me for anything, I was sure that they would knock on my door before entering. I also had the power to keep people I did not want to see out of my room. My room was my own private place.

(3) Now, I share a room with someone else. My roommate does not knock when she wants to enter our room. I can still lie sprawled across my bed, but if I roll over I look right at my roommate, sitting on the bed across from mine. I no longer have the power to keep people out of my room. If someone knocks, my roommate will let them in. My room is now a shared place.

(4) When I lived at home, my mother made my dinner. She also packed a lunch for me to take to school. I took baths nightly, soaking in the hot water and reading a book. In the morning, I drove my four-door Buick to school. If I was hungry late at night, I would pop something in the microwave. Living at home allowed me to enjoy things that I am unable to enjoy at college.

(5) My mother is no longer able to cook my dinner. I have to go to the cafeteria. There are no bathtubs in the dorm, only showers. Every morning, I take my bucket containing shampoo and conditioner and walk to the bathroom. If I am lucky there will be hot water left and hopefully not many people will flush the toilet, which causes the water to get extremely hot. I walk to each one of my classes and look longingly at every four-door Buick that passes me. What I once thought were necessities are now luxuries.

(6) Although I had more privacy in high school, I did
not have much freedom. Everywhere I went I had to have someone’s permission. One warm day, my friends and I decided to leave school for lunch. There were two ways to leave school: legally and illegally. If we wanted to leave legally we had to have a note from our parents stating why we were leaving. None of us had such a note so we decided to leave illegally. We made it to Burger King without anyone noticing, but we arrived back at school later than expected. The lunch period was over and classes had already begun. We couldn’t just walk into class late without a pass and we couldn’t get a pass without a legal excuse. In the end, we all made up some lie and got the sacred passes. Whatever freedom we had enjoyed had been won through deceit. In high school, I had to have a pass to roam the halls or leave the school. I was not trusted to exercise my own judgment.

There are no such things as passes in college. I can go to Burger King at lunchtime without worrying about being caught. If I happen to be late for a class, I just walk in with a guilty glance at the professor. There have been times when I woke up late and did not make it to class at all. I knew that my professor would not call home and tell my mother that I had missed class without an excuse. However, now that I have more freedom I also have more responsibility. Now that I am trusted, I must exercise my judgment. I must become my own monitor.

When I lived at home, every night before I went to bed, my dad would ask in a concerned way, "Did you finish your homework?" Every Sunday morning, my mother would stand by my bed and say, "You’d better get up or you will be late for church." My parents made it their responsibility to make sure I got to school on time, and once I got there it was the teacher’s responsibility to make sure that I stayed there.

Now that I am in college, every night before I go to bed, I make sure that I have completed my homework. My father is no longer my watchdog, making sure that I do everything that I am supposed to do. Every Sunday morning, my alarm goes off and I struggle out of bed. Sometimes I don’t quite make it, but my mother is not there to give me a lecture on the importance of going to church. Sometimes I don’t quite make it to my classes either. It is now my responsibility to make sure I go to classes and complete my homework. I no longer depend on my parents to make sure that I do these things.

When my parents call, I try and dispel their anxieties about my life at college. They may worry about my loss of comforts but I revel in my new freedom. Now I must learn to use my freedom responsibly. My decisions are now my own, but I must also learn to live with the consequences of these decisions. This is what it means to be a college student, and this, I imagine, is what it means to be an adult.