"MS"

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[Assignment: Write an essay in which you define something that resists easy definition, or something you feel qualified, by your reading or your experience, to define more precisely than any dictionary can. What is high school, really? When, for you, did childhood end and something else begin? What does it really mean when someone says to you that they want to be "just friends"?]

Some people think of the loss of childhood as the gain of responsibility. When childhood ends, you become responsible for yourself and for your actions. You become more independent, are assigned more chores, get more allowance, and can finally cross the street by yourself. However, when I think about my childhood ending, I don't think of responsibility or about earning the trust of my parents. It is a period when your interests change and you can see more of the world than you saw as a child. Summer is no longer thought of as simply a huge span of time to do nothing but play and eat slurpees. It is now three months and there is a schedule to keep. The things that were exciting to you when you were younger are no longer interesting. This doesn't mean that when you reach a phase in your life when playing cowboys and Indians isn't fun anymore that your childhood has ended. It means that there comes a time, which is different for everyone, when we suddenly see the big picture and the simple pleasures of childhood fade away and adulthood sets in.

When my sister and I were young, we loved playing a game that we called "Ms." We each had a family made up of our favorite dolls (which were at least four or five each) and a wonderful, loving, make-believe husband (usually the hottest boy in the class). We played "Ms" wherever we went; in the car, on vacations, at the dentist's office, walking to the 7-11 to get slurpees, after school, the list goes on and on. We each had a walkie-talkie that we would use to call each other. We would use the Morse code button to get each other to pick up and then we would invite each other over for tea. Some days we had tea in my room and other days we had tea in Emily's room. I would run the water in the bathroom until it "boiled," or so we thought; then we would fill our plastic tea cups with the hot water and drop a tic tac in for taste--cinnamon on special days and spearmint or wintergreen on ordinary days. We would line our "kids" up against the bed and have P.T.O meetings. Each month we made a calendar that we filled with the various social events for that month. There were garden sales to volunteer at, field trips to supervise, Market Day orders to pick up and car pools to drive. We both had identical gray binders that held all of our P.T.O. materials so that they would always be organized. We carried them with us everywhere that we went that week so that we could jot down notes to discuss at the next meeting. Periodically, our "kids" would interrupt us and we would take time out of our meeting to tell them to stop fighting or to comfort them--of course, we never cared because that was just part of being a busy mother.
Emily and I spent hours and hours playing "Ms." At every meeting we would rename our "kids" and/or chose new husbands. Each of us had an old faithful, I guess you could call him, but sometimes we got bored with our husbands and wanted new ones. There was no such thing as a divorce, however. The old husbands simply disappeared and we went on with our game. Our children never grew up; in fact, many times they got younger as the game progressed because babies were much more fun than toddlers, but we were always very careful to space them exactly nine months apart to make it as realistic as possible.

Em and I played this game from the time I was in first or second grade until I was in sixth. I guess you could say that I was a late bloomer because while other kids moved on to having boyfriends and going to the movies I was much too shy. I had more fun staying home and playing "Ms" with Emily. I continued to play this little game with my sister while other kids were getting into the social scene. To me, reality was the pressure of having the most stickers in my sticker book, having a boyfriend, getting the coolest clothes, and who kissed whom. Those things were no fun and this was my way to make my life perfect. I began to use the game to make myself feel better about myself when no boys were interested in me. However, when I got into junior high, "Ms" became totally unrealistic to me. I began to realize that life was definitely not like the innocent game that my sister and I had played for years. Marriage didn't always last forever and the kids got older instead of younger. It wasn't fun anymore because I knew that life was so much more complicated than it was when we played "Ms."

I'm not exactly sure how this realization came about. I think it really hit when I was in eighth grade and my closest cousin died. He was the brother that I never had and the kind of person that everyone loved and admired. I think that I grew up a lot during that year and I no longer liked to pretend that life was perfect because it was so obvious to me that it definitely wasn't. The death of my cousin made my see that pretending only means getting hurt when you have to face reality.

In my opinion, this is when my childhood ended. From this point on, the games that Emily and I played were focused on jobs, cars, and money. Instead of pretending to have a family we played office, went through catalogs and picked out all of the clothes that we wanted to buy, or claimed cars that we passed as ones we wanted to own. The dolls were retired to their shelves, for me at least, and real-life boys became much more interesting than make-believe husbands. I began to worry about my hair and my clothes and all the pleasure I got out of make-believe games seemed to disappear.

In general, I think that childhood ends when reality becomes so obvious that you can't help but deal with it. Childhood means being carefree and happy, with no cares about the future. Childhood is hot summer days, mud pies, and big wheel races. It's waking up, going out to play and having no sense of time except for meal times when your mother calls you inside. However, there comes a point in everyone's life when the world consists of more than that. The simple pleasures of childhood simply aren't enough to make you happy because there is the knowledge that, no matter what you pretend, the real world will always exist.
is a natural desire for more than the simplicities of childhood. Although there are the added responsibilities of growing up, there is more to it than that. Suddenly, you realize that you have to grow up someday and go to high school, college, get married; you have a future to plan for. Time becomes such a real part of your life that there's no time for anything carefree, or for childhood for that matter.