"Here, try some of this," said one of my classmates as she passed me a blue bottle of hairspray. 

“What are you talking about?” I asked.

“It’s peach schnapps, a kind of alcohol, I found in my basement.” I took the bottle in my hand and carefully looked around the dimly lit back section of the gym locker room. This was hardly the place where I had envisioned trying alcohol for the first time. I sat down on the bench as my other classmates were sipping alcohol from the other circulating bottles and finally took a few drinks myself. The clear peachy smelling alcohol went down quickly, and I sat still for a minute expecting something dramatic to happen like an extreme surge of power. Instead, all I felt was a sharp burn in my stomach and a lingering scent of peaches on my breath. Finally, my classmates and I carefully locked the bottles away in one of the lockers and exited the locker room into the gym, ready to begin class. I still remember clearly all of the faces I saw in the gym that day. We all shared the same blank stares that mesmerized our gym teacher. It was not until two days later that the word began to circulate around school that a number of girls in the seventh grade, first-hour gym class were brave enough to try alcohol before class.

Eventually, my entire world came to a screeching halt. The word quickly spread that Mr. Sykes, the principal, had found out that some girls in the first period gym class were drinking. I remember sitting in second hour as I watched the door closely for an office aide to come in with a green slip. Green slips were always the worst kind because everyone knew that they came directly from the principal. Third and fourth hour passed as I sat in complete horror, wishing that I had never wanted to try that mysterious concoction. Why couldn’t I have tried it at a party or somewhere else instead? Lunch passed and I was sitting in fifth hour history class when the office aide entered into the classroom with a green pass. Taking around the room, I realized I was the only girl in the room that had first hour gym. Within five minutes, I was sitting in a chair outside the principal’s office. A hundred images, fears, and regrets raced through my mind along with the million butterflies in my stomach that were causing me to feel nauseous. I began to get hysterical, picturing myself as a convicted felon that would be expelled from school. I knew already this incident was going to hang over me for years like a huge thunder cloud. I was rudely escorted into the principal’s office before I even had a chance to figure out what I was going to say to him. Should I admit I had tried the alcohol or should I deny everything? It was too late
though. Before I had a chance to decide anything, Mr. Sykes suspended me for one week, and my father was on his way to get me.

I remember sitting in the office conference room watching for my father to drive down the entrance to the junior high. My entire life I had always been “daddy’s little girl.” Sitting in horror I remember thinking, “Was I still going to be daddy’s little girl?” It seemed as if my dad arrived within minutes; actually, it was about a half an hour later. However, I was still in shock and had not even thought of how I was going to explain to my parents what I had done. When my dad appeared in the office, we were both placed in the principal’s office as Mr. Sykes explained what had happened and what my punishment would be. I remember how irate my father became as his face turned fire red. He apologized to the principal for my disappointing, inappropriate behavior and took me by the arm to the car.

I cried the entire way home as my father grilled me with questions. Who brought the alcohol? Where did they get it? Why did I do this? What was I thinking? Did I know how serious this is? Then came the lingering silence from my father, only to be ended by my sobs. By the time we arrived home, my father had forbidden me to hang out with any of my old friends, grounded me indefinitely, and, worst of all, said I was going to have to find some way to explain all of this to my mother.

At four o’clock my mother entered the house. Immediately, my mom knew I was in trouble. Looking into my mother’s face, I went blank. How was I going to explain to my mother, a teacher, that I had just been suspended from school. Besides, my mom had always stressed the importance of doing well in school. Not having any idea how to explain to my mother that I had just been suspended from school for drinking, I just told her, “I was suspended from school today for one week.” The following minutes of rage were nothing compared to what my dad had already displayed. My mother flew into the kitchen, began dumping out all the alcohol, and then after about fifteen minutes returned to the living room where I was waiting. After answering the same questions for my mother, I was sent to my room.

The next morning I woke up and was given what seemed like a jail sentence. I was no longer allowed to have any contact with the girls that were suspended. My sentence included being grounded from the phone entirely and prohibited from going to any school functions, such as games or dances, until the end of the school year.

At the time I thought for sure my parents were going to turn me into a social outcast, and I was furious because not one of my other friends was even punished. However, a few days into spring break I started to view things a little differently, when some of my friends were caught by their parents drinking again. I did not understand what they liked about these adult concoctions. They did not even taste good to me. Maybe they were just rebelling or trying to fit in; after all, everyone just wanted to be cool. As I looked at these girls, I started to see how stupid and unappealing they looked and acted.
Very slowly the next three months passed and I did survive. Reality hit hard when the local papers and newscasters bombarded the area with the shocking story. I was embarrassed to be part of the problem. However, I did learn some very important things from this unerasable mistake in my junior high years. Most importantly, I realized that what I did was serious and that even though I was furious at the time with my parents for grounding me, I deserved it. I realized from this experience that I had disappointed my parents as well as myself. I began to believe having an education was important, that attending school is not a right but a privilege, a privilege that I lost for a week and almost for good. In addition, I missed going to the mall or to the games with my friends. For the first time, I began to see how much fun these events were and that drinking was never involved. Therefore, my parents were not punishing me, but instead trying to guide me in the right direction. After all, I did have friends that did not drink, so I could hang out with them instead of the ones who would get me into trouble.

Looking back on this event six years later, it is evident that it has shaped my life in many ways. It significantly altered the light in which I view my parents. By grounding me instead of lecturing me and telling me not to drink alcohol because it was bad, my parents caused me to evaluate things carefully. Without my parents, I would probably have continued to hang out with the wrong crowd. I first realized how important my parents were last June. As I walked across that auditorium stage in a white cap and gown to shake hands with the principal and receive my high school diploma, I remember looking out at my parents. Thinking back at that point, I realized how lucky I was to have parents. My parents had helped guide me for the past eighteen years of my life and now everything was up to me. I was going to have to put all the experiences of my past behind me and build on what I had learned. In addition to changing the way I viewed my parents, I have discovered that peer pressure comes in many forms. Young adolescents need to realize curiosity is a form of peer pressure. Often teenagers are simply lectured “Just Say No.” Yet, many teenagers still experiment with drugs, alcohol, and sex. When curiosity overrules reason, then alcohol, drugs, or sex are tried. Wrong choices lead young adults down unexpected paths that can be both detrimental and meaningful experiences.