This I Believe:

I Believe in Creating My Own “College Experience”

The phrase “college experience” gets thrown around a lot. Recently, I’ve heard it a lot more often, what with the application process beginning just a few months ago and my college life only beginning to blossom. Ever since I was little, I knew I would be attending the University of Cincinnati. My dad is a physics professor at UC , which not only provides tuition remission but discounts all around the UC campus as well. The fact that I was a shoe- in for the Honors Program at a world- renowned university and the Cincinnatus cash I earned only sweetened the deal.

As you can see, my decision was a simple one. However, it was not so simple for my peers to accept. At Seven Hills, my school and my home away from home since I was two as well as the top ranked private school in Cincinnati, most people overlooked the achievements of UC. The opportunities possible in attending UC slipped past most of my classmates who scavenged for the top, most expensive liberal arts schools and sought to be accepted into one of the Ivies. The gem that is UC, a school right under their noses, failed to impress them. “You can do so much better,” they told me. They told me that going to school too close to home negates the “college experience.” I nodded politely, considering their words, but I knew that if I was to create my own “college experience” and jump- start my “college student” status, my decisions needed to be independent.

Once I accepted my admission to UC, I pondered the decision of whether or not to commute instead of staying in a residence hall. I decided on the former. Sure, my decision wasn’t eco- friendly due to my almost ten- year old, oil- guzzling, gas- chugging Toyota Land Cruiser that I dubbed the name Cassandra, but it sure made my parents’ pockets happy. Not only that, but as a family- oriented person I knew that the decision to commute was the best choice for me. But apparently it was not a typical choice, and the concept was frowned upon by most of my classmates, though they tried desperately to hide their disdain. But I could see it in their eyes, which triggered an epiphany in the inner- workings of my mind:

Everyone who pushed the term “college experience” on me, the people who urged me to leave the nest and take dorm life by storm, those who chastised me for not trying new things—they weren’t practicing what they preached. The hypocrisy just dawned on my one day. They scolded me for not being open to new things, but what they really meant by “college experience” was the “typical college experience.” The descriptor was just silent, although it had bean hiding there the whole time, between the sarcastic quotation mark and the hard “c” sound of “college.” One of my friends even called me a “loser” despite the fact that I made honor roll for each quarter of my high school career and she barely managed a 2.0 grade point average. Staying in a dorm and moving out of Cincinnati was the norm, which made my choice scary and weird, not special or unique. The looks I got and still get as a result of my decision once made me cower, but now they empower me. I don’t judge those who stay in dorms and move away, but what is right for them isn’t necessarily right for me.

I like driving to campus every day to go to class and meet new people and hang out with new friends, but at the same time I cherish being able to come back to my family for a home- cooked meal and a break from campus life. My college experience, no quotation marks, is mine and mine alone, and it is not necessarily what anyone else expects from me, but it is my version of the term and no one else’s.