

Rites of Passage: The Quest for Adolescent Freedom
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The famous author Dr. Seuss once said, “You’re on your own and you know what you know and you are the one who will decide where to go.” In life, there are various moments conflicting and working with one another to lead us to the person we are. Moments of impact when one is younger that forever changes a person. There are moments that make you weak and feeble or strong and courageous. Nevertheless, there are hundreds, thousands if not millions of moments that help create the special person that you are. However, in one person’s life there is a moment or moments that stand vastly above the rest. A moment so impactful it made a person realize that they were making a change from adolescent to becoming more like an adult. I like to call this moment a “rite of passage.” A rite of passage is a term used to describe an impactful moment in one’s life that forever changes a person leading them to adulthood and departing from their teenage years. Every single person in the world has that moment. A rite of passage can be joyful and moving or a rite of passage can be frightening and devastating. Regardless, there is no correct answer; a rite of passage is simply a rite of passage and each one has their own individual story to tell.

I love rites of passages. I love hearing people’s stories and hearing how things happened. I find rites of passages to be very informative and helpful, but also extremely entertaining. You could call me passionate. Therefore, I wanted to conduct my research over rites of passages. My aim was to interview six various Americans and French on what they felt was their rite of passage, the moment that made them feel liberated and coming of age. I interviewed various people but chose three Americans and three French of all different walks of life stories to be shared. The reasoning was to show how the freedoms and life has changed between the generations. One generation lived through different events and technology than the other. In addition, the purpose was to learn more about America, France and their people. The stories were

to show the cultural differences between the two wonderful countries and how liberties or hardships can vary between France and America. I conducted all my research with a video camera and created a film to document the findings. Therefore, with a video camera and passion in my heart I began my findings in the small, lovely, truly American town of Ada, Oklahoma.

I began my research with a young man named Daniel Bonar. Daniel is a junior in high school and is currently homeschooled. Daniel is seventeen and has lived in Ada his entire life. Mr. Bonar decided to tell me what he thought his rite of passage was, driving. In the United States, turning sixteen and getting your license is seen by many as a rite of passage and one of the most memorable. Daniel explained that there were various reasons why turning sixteen and getting his license was liberating and made him feel more like an adult. The first reason was because he had independence. Prior to receiving his license, Daniel had to depend on either his mother or father to taxi-cab him around and get him to and from his events. After receiving his license, Daniel was able to transport himself without either of his parents, therefore making him feel more like a young man and less like an adolescent boy. To many, independence is seen as the first few steps into adulthood. Daniel was very happy to be independent.

The second reason Daniel explained was he now had the ability to travel as wished. Beforehand, Daniel was only allowed to go to certain places that his parents could drive him to. However, now Daniel could take trips to Norman and Oklahoma City whenever he pleased, within reason. Taking trips to Oklahoma City alone can be very liberating and freeing when one is driving around downtown Oklahoma City without parents telling them to slow down, change lanes or stop! Back seat drivers are not very comical.

However, this is where a huge difference comes into play between the United States and France. In the United States, an individual is permitted to drive if one has taken the correct courses and passed the standard driving test required to his/her state. Secondly, the individual must be at least sixteen years of age. This is true with France; however, one must be eighteen years of age to drive. When I explained this to Daniel he was not very excited. He felt that sixteen was the perfect age and that eighteen was far too old. In France, many of the students had no knowledge that Americans can drive at sixteen. The reason is because most French are taught about the United Kingdom and learn British English, which is more practical because England is only a few hours away. Many of the students I spoke to on this subject were very shocked at America's driving age, and were a little jealous that when I was sixteen I had a car and could drive. On the contrary, many of the French were not bothered by France's driving age. Daniel is very content with the freedoms he has today, and finds driving to be one of the most important and that that moment forever changed his life towards adulthood.

The second person I conducted my research with was someone very dear to me, my mother. Sharon Cunningham is a fifty year old school teacher who resides with her husband and family of four in Ada, Oklahoma. Sharon was born in Wyoming where she was raised. However, Sharon has lived in vast amounts of places such as Idaho, Colorado, Nevada and now Oklahoma. Sharon felt that her moment that made her transition into womanhood was her first time to attend a formal dance.

In addition, it was not just the dance that liberated her but all of the fun first time events that occurred for the duration of the formal. Prior to the 8th grade formal dance, Sharon had never worn makeup or a formal dress; she also had never been on a date with a boy or attended a real formal dance. Therefore, Sharon began to experience many first time events that liberated

her. Sharon felt that getting to go on a date was a momentous occasion. She had never been alone on a date with a boy, ever. The next best part was getting to wear makeup. Sharon explained that spending hours in the bathroom getting ready truly made her begin to feel like a lady, but the icing on the cake was wearing her formal gown. Many women can recall their first formal gown. Sharon explained that putting it on and looking in the mirror she was different, she was no longer a little girl, but a young lady.

In comparison to today's generations, many of my peers would feel that Mrs. Cunningham experienced a majority of those events at a much older age than the girls of today. In my generation girls started wearing makeup in late elementary school where they also began to date boys. However, by 8th grade many have already experienced those events unlike my mother. This shows that there have been changes in generations.

Overall, my mother loved her first formal dance and had the time of her life. Sharon felt that she was finally growing up and becoming a woman. In addition, she also felt free and independent because she did not have deal with her parents at the formal. Mrs. Cunningham cherishes this experience and will forever remember it as her rite of passage.

The third and last American I interviewed was Mrs. Alberta May Blackburn. I met Mrs. Blackburn because she is my piano teacher's mother. She is a very caring and loving elder and I thought her stories would be phenomenal because of her age. Mrs. Blackburn was born on May 6th, 1924 in Cushing, Oklahoma. She has lived in various parts of Oklahoma, but for the majority of her life has resided in Ada, Oklahoma. She is currently employed at Blackburn Piano Studio as the secretary and greets me with a joyful attitude and smile for every piano lesson. I thought asking Mrs. Blackburn to recall a moment that was impactful and important from her young age

would be difficult, however she is just as intelligent and quick witted as any teenager I know. After telling me a few stories she decided she had a couple rites of passage she deemed life changing and valuable. The first was falling in love.

During her sophomore year of high school Alberta fell in love with a very talented basketball player in the grade above her, Billy Blackburn. He then proceeded to graduate and went off to serve in World War II. While he was away they wrote letters and kept in touch. When he returned they married and bought a house in Oklahoma City with a G.I. loan of one-hundred dollars. These events made her feel more like an adult because children do not fall in love, or write to their significant other while they are off serving the country during a world war. The duration of the 1940's is very different than today, back then these kinds of stories were normal. Today they seem too good to be true. In today's society not as many people stay committed during events like a war or living far distances, while it may occur it is not a common occurrence. My generation tends to grow bored and lonely when their significant other is not present.

Alberta May Blackburn fell in love, married the man of her dreams and felt that was her rite of passage. Those events liberated her and made her become independent from her parents. She was no longer a schoolgirl, but a well-rounded woman, with a love story for the history books.

I had no idea what to expect in France. I was nervous and excited and worried about my language skills. Would my host family like me? Would my project be successful? Would I be able to communicate the skills of my project adequately? Thankfully everything went smoothly and I was able to conduct multiple interviews. I picked the top three interviews I felt were the

most useful and individualistic. The first interview I performed in France was with my host brother, Nathan François. Nathan was born on May 20th 1997 in château-Thierry. Today Nathan lives with his family in Soissons, France. He is currently enrolled at Lycée Leonard De Vinci as a sophomore or as the French say *Première*. Nathan's rite of passage as a young man had a few events.

The first event that Nathan felt started his journey into adulthood was being given more freedom from his parents. Once Nathan's parents generously gave him more freedom he was permitted to go into Soissons by himself and spend time with his comrades. At this time, Nathan began to have his first sleep overs at his friends' houses. This means his parents had begun to accept that they were losing their little boy and he was becoming a young man. During his final year of collège, (junior high) he noticed a ginormous difference with the freedom his parents allowed. His parents began to treat him more like an adult. Nathans freedom began to increase. In the United States, a majority of kids begin to make the same transition from child with guarded parents, to young adult with less parent interaction in their personal lives. When I was in junior high, my parents allowed me to go more places alone and do things I had never done before. I was allowed to go to the movies and restaurants without my parents, however it was because they trusted me and if I broke their trust, my ties would be destroyed and I would not be given the privileges I had received. As for my friends, I noticed they were given the same liberties too and we all began to make that transition from young, innocent school children to more intelligent young adults, the same occurs with the French. In my host family, I had a host sister named Emma who was in her final year of collège. Emma was treated closely the same as Nathan. However, I did notice her parents kept her closer than Nathan.

The second event that made Nathan feel liberated was his first loves. Although they were not serious, he felt that starting to date was a transition from adolescent to adulthood. Nathan felt that your first loves, although not serious, evolved you more into a young man. Therefore, his first girlfriends helped prepare him for his first real love. Today, Nathan is currently in a serious relationship with his girlfriend, Ophélie. While in France, he was very busy hosting me, therefore he did not spend vast amounts of time with her, but when his girlfriend and him were together they were inseparable and seemed very in love and content. Nathan felt that part of his coming of age was being able to attend events alone with friends and start dating as his rite of passage, which many teenagers inquire today.

The more time I spent in France, the more I fell in love with it. I began to love the language, food, fashion, architecture, history and people. I truly fell in love with the people. I found the French to be very kind and helpful when it came to understanding and learning the language. Many of the Soissonnais even opened up their personal life to me; one in particular was my second French interview with Gilles Payard. Monsieur Gilles Payard was born on March 15th, 1961 in Pointe Noire in Congo, Africa. At the age of three he moved to his current home, France. Gilles is currently employed at a local collège in Soissons, where he is the principal. Monsieur Payard's rite of passage began with him enriching me with the story of his military service.

In Gilles Payard's interview, Gilles explained that he felt his time in the military changed him from a feeble boy to a well-rounded man. The reasoning was because he had to complete meticulous tasks and not only take care of himself, but also his fellow men. Living as a child, one is typically self-obsessed and selfish; being selfless is what shows really good adult like character. Gilles said it was not just serving that made him more into a man, but also the little

things like making his bed. In life, there does not have to be a huge event that can change your life. Moments can be small and build up to make you into you and for Gilles it was not just joining the military, but also the little daily tasks he completed that made him feel more like an adult. In the military one is dependent upon their fellow soldiers and leaders. Unlike the other stories where a majority of the events came from finding independence, Gilles' come from his dependence on his fellow men. Working as a team and functioning together can be an extraneous and difficult task. For children this mission is impossible most of the time. However, adults are much stronger candidates for working as one unit.

Gilles felt that his overall experience lead him into becoming a man. All of the training he endured and meticulous tasks prepared him for adulthood. In the military he became a man. Today as a principal he stands strong in his beliefs, because the military taught him life lessons that he carried into adulthood. The once young feeble boy who entered the military scared and unknowing left strong, knowledgeable and dignified. Moreover, that is the reason Gilles Payard explained military service as his rite of passage.

My duration at Lycée Leonard De Vinci changed my life forever. I learned so much about the culture and language at the lycée. I was constantly getting to interact with not only the lycée's students, but the faculty as well. One of the most important people I met was Le Proviseur Adjoin (assistant principal). Le Proviseur known by his colleagues as Grégoire Hamard is the youngest principal in France. In the duration of my time at Leonard De Vinci we had various conversations. Therefore, I was given the pleasure to conduct an interview with him. I utilized this interview because I found his rites of passage to be informative and useful. Like many Frenchmen he had various stories and could not decide on just one.

Grégoire Hamard was born in the French department (which is the French's version of a state) Aisne. Aisne is the department that I resided in during my stay and where the lycée is located. Monsieur Grégoire Hamard is currently thirty-two years old. The first rite of passage he stated was receiving his bachelor's degree. He felt that this was a very important moment for all of the French who participate in receiving a higher education. Grégoire believed that you should always reach for further studies. You should never stop learning. This moment was important because it allowed him to take on the responsibilities as an adult by being a teacher. He was now responsible for students and their success. He loved that he was able to encourage students as a student because he was so young. Monsieur Hamard was all for the students' success and making sure every student reached their full potential. The second rite of passage he felt changed his life towards adulthood was having to face students. For many it can be seen as a difficult task. How do I teach students? How do I get them to obey and respect me? How can I lead them towards success? These thoughts can be overwhelming. However, as an adult Grégoire was able to accomplish all his responsibilities and discover how to teach and care for his students.

The third rite of passage for Monsieur Hamard was the transition from teacher to principal. Grégoire felt that he needed to advance in every stage of his career and take on new responsibilities. This so far has been the strongest task. The transition from teacher to principal must have been very difficult. However, Grégoire seems to flawlessly help lead and control the school. Many of the students like Le Proviseur and think he is helpful and caring. Grégoire Hamard has an outstanding reputation at the lycée. I never heard anyone speak poorly of Monsieur Hamard.

The last rite of passage Mr. Hamard explained to me was his overall studies in France. At one point he studied in the Parisian Region. For Monsieur, living on your own and putting

yourself through university is very liberating, because one is responsible for themselves. One has to wake themselves up and attend class, study and live alone. Mommy and Daddy are not present to take care of your needs. You are free to succeed or fail.

Culturally I noticed a huge difference between the United States and France. In the United States, we call our principals by their last name. In France they addressed the headmaster as Monsieur Le Proviseur and Le Proviseur Adjoin. However, when it came to teachers the same way of name calling applied. In addition, in France you do not call an adult Mr. or Mrs. and then state their first name. In the United States we sometimes address people as Mr. Dylan or Miss Lorena. This name calling is our way of being personable and cute. However, in France it is considered highly offensive and inappropriate.

For Monsieur Hamard, his rites of passage were your very standard experiences. Many French and Americans deal with the stress and struggle of growing up while attending university. Higher education is brutal in both countries and one is responsible for their own success. Grégoire thought being able to change students' lives and grow as a person made him feel more like an adult. Monsieur Hamard's progression in his job field showed that hard work and dedication can take you to better places, such as a higher position job.

In conclusion, rites of passages are different for every single person on the planet. Although we may have similar experiences, everyone is an individual with their own coming of age story. Your rite of passage may be falling in love, freedom from your parents, joining the military, your first formal, driving or becoming a higher power in the education field. However, everyone has a rite of passage with a story to tell. My research I conducted in America and France deemed very important. Today I am able to share my experiences with my fellow

students and daily personnel. Because of this journey, I have video documentation for people to hand on view their stories, educating America and France about our rites of passages and the fellow generations. I loved hearing these stories and learning about every person I interviewed. I feel that it was a rite of passage to me to have this opportunity. I was able to learn and share these stories with various people, which was my goal. I am completely satisfied with my research and could not be any happier with the results I found. Everyone has a story to tell, a moment of impact that leads them into adulthood, forever changing their lives.

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A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Dylan Cunningham". The ink is black and the signature is fluid and connected.

Dylan Cunningham