

Many students will relate to the following essay by Margaret Elizabeth Connell, who describes the familiar rite of passage of learning to drink coffee. Margaret's flair for detail makes her a good storyteller, as in her opening description of grabbing her morning cup of coffee (but not drinking it until she arrives at school). Margaret draws in the reader for two full paragraphs before subtly sharing the main idea—that she wanted to drink coffee in order to feel grown up—almost as an aside. Margaret ultimately learns that she can be mature without the coffee, a final realization that has the reader nodding in agreement. "It took about three months to make my essay the way it is now," recalls Margaret. "I worked on it a lot during the summer before my senior year."

Essay by Margaret Elizabeth Connell

At seven thirty, every morning, I race down the stairs, as fast as my drowsy body permits me, and take a detour through the kitchen on my way to the door. I pick up my filled to-go cup, with the same urgency and accuracy of a relay racer reaching for the baton. The purple isolated container has been graciously filled by my mom with piping hot coffee brewed by my father earlier that morning. I don't dare try a drop of the scorching drink until I pull into the school parking lot. Once arriving at school, I finally sip on the black coffee, no cream, no sugar, armed and ready to face the long day.

My dad drinks coffee all hours of the day. When he's home, there's always a comforting, fresh pot in the kitchen that fills the whole house with a warm, cozy ambience. And my mom refuses to start the day without a warm latte. She concocts one every morning with different creamers and sugar. Ever since I was young, I had watched my parents drink coffee and I enviously dreamed about being old enough to enjoy a cup. My elder cousins grew older and began drinking coffee. In the mornings, they now could stand in the

kitchen and lean nonchalantly against the counters, chatting with the adults. From my seat at the kitchen table I watched jealously and glanced pitifully to my glass of cold orange juice.

My family and I were in the airport early in the morning destined for Denver, Colorado, when my parents wanted a second cup of caffeine, so we went to the terminal's Cup O' Joe café. My brother, David, and I were always given hot chocolate as our default hot beverage, but that day in an effort to assert my age I asked for a cup of coffee. My parents, laughing in disbelief, scanned the menu and ordered me a cup half filled with coffee, but then leveled off with the familiar hot chocolate. The steamy liquid concoction eliminated my distaste for coffee! I could consume this new drink without trying to conceal my disgusted face from my parents. By my sophomore year I had become the champion, after weaning myself off the chocolate milk, I could digest a cup of hot black coffee with ease and grace. And I made sure my entire family was aware of my new talent by downing cups of coffee every morning.

I loved the new privileges I gained as a coffee consumer in my family. I could participate in conversations about politics or family gossip during breakfast as I casually leaned against the counter and gawked at truths that were revealed. I felt like an adult in my family; my opinions could be heard, my actions could be trusted, and my independence began to expand.

But David allowed me to see the true reason for my new independence—I was actually becoming an adult. I had trained myself for years to become immune to coffee's bitter taste, but I didn't need to. My brother tried coffee and didn't like it, so he never drank it. And to my dismay, he was still earning the same increments of freedoms that I had once gained when I was his age. Coffee had nothing to do with it. I now only drink coffee when I want it. And I can stand in the kitchen and talk with the adults no matter what the temperature of my beverage is.

That day, in an effort to assert my age, I asked for a cup of coffee.

Margaret Elizabeth Connell attends Virginia Tech.