5. Discuss an accomplishment or event, formal or informal, that marked your transition from childhood to adulthood within your culture, community, or family.

When I first stepped onto the tarmac, I was apprehensive and excited, gazing at the surrounding indigo mountains in amazement, and when I turned to follow the rest of the passengers to the terminal, I promptly tripped on my suitcase and went sprawling.

My transition from childhood into adulthood was not a graceful glide from one to the next, but instead a jarring fall. I went to Barcelona, Spain last July to help a family teach their daughter English and to discover a whole new world I’d never experienced before. Three weeks after my arrival, I was conversing in fluent Spanish to a cheerful stranger after being tumbled by a forceful Mediterranean wave. I felt comfortable in my skin, and no longer had the crippling fears I felt at home before I left.

I traveled to the city of Barcelona as an excited child, and I left the foreign country as an optimistic and determined adult. I dreamed of talking to Greek philosophers or Japanese fishermen, and I worked to make my dream a reality. After being hired as an English teacher for a family in Barcelona, I found myself on a jet plane headed for BCN with a letter of recommendation for my host family in the pocket of my favorite navy blue hoodie. For the first time in my life, a sweeping ocean physically separated me from my friends and family, and I was living with strangers. It was frightening, but that didn’t stop me. I was determined to see the world with my own two eyes, not just through the pages of a book or dinnertime anecdotes.

My family is full of travelers, and I’ve learned to absorb different cultures like an eager sponge. My mother prepared me to be open to all ideas and to give everyone a chance before judging them. My father encouraged me to try new things and experience both the most minute moments and the colossal epiphanies in life. I had heard this advice numerous times growing up, but it wasn’t until I was meandering down a cobblestone side street that I realized their worth. My age didn’t make me an adult, but my experiences and wisdom earned did. I could read about 100 different adults in 100 different eras, but I wouldn’t understand them until I had experienced a little of what they felt. This was a hard lesson to learn, for it left me feeling young and ignorant, but this realization also taught me a lesson I’ll never forget. It taught me that I needed to go outside my comfort zone and explore, to follow unknown paths, to go on adventures with strangers and friends alike. Becoming an adult gave me the courage to be who I want to be.

Now, several months later, I am officially 18 and a legal adult. I don’t feel any different than I did that sunny day at the beach in Barcelona; instead, I embraced my new understanding and applied it to my life here in the United States. I now take the time to stop and talk to the cashiers in my local markets and help out freshman around campus when they need help. One day I hope to travel to each of the seven continents, meet interesting people and penguins along the way, and see the sunrise from a different point of view. I want to take what I’ve learned and share it, and I want to take what is shared and learn it. I’ve come to realize how vast the world is and how small I am, yet I still want to venture out and see it all. My childhood has ended, but my dreams to make new friends around the globe and to see distant lands continues with my new adult outlook.