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Project Hope

Prompt 3

It's no secret that the majority of high school students struggle with their identity. The difference between the majority of high school students and myself is that my identity crisis was short-lived and ultimately led me to develop into the person that I'm proud to be today. I fought publicly with my identity, instead of fighting internally with myself, as most do. I dropped my friends from middle school, I dyed my hair six times, I never wore anything resembling femininity, I pierced my ears five times, and I stopped wearing makeup. These may all sound like typical teenage experiences, that is unless you were raised in a private, catholic elementary and middle school, and continued with your private, catholic education in high school. None of this conveys who I am today, but it helped me get here. I'm most proud of the fact that I never emulated another's personality. I was comfortable being uncomfortable in a society that is so afraid to stray from the familiar.

This journey of self discovery ultimately produced an individual who refuses to wear a mask, even though it would be so much easier. I've recently learned that the majority of my peers appreciate, and even envy, me for my refusal to concede to a typical identity crisis. In a series of uncharacteristic events, I was recently nominated and then crowned Homecoming Queen. It's been quite difficult maintaining a sense of humility after this anomaly in my life, especially because of how much pride I had in myself afterward. It might sound silly to be proud of this, since some assume that this accomplishment was last on my list of priorities, but I can't think of another situation that can so blatantly solidify everyone's approval of you. I stood on stage, at my coronation, and squinted into the crowd past the blinding lights. I saw my friends at the front of the crowd. I looked past them and saw the entire student body jumping and

screaming something in unison. They were chanting my name. It might seem hypocritical of me, considering my initial refusal to seek the approval of others, but all of a sudden it means so much because it helped me recognize something important: These people appreciate and admire my authenticity, which is something I'm not used to, especially in a society that is terrified of showing its true self. I fascinate people because they've never seen someone so different from everyone, yet so comfortable and accepted into their society.

Despite the extent to which these recent events inflated my ego, there's still a part of me that isn't as prideful as I preach it to be. This unfortunate part of my character is still insecure about how separate I am from my peers. This voice in the back of my head still questions why everyone thinks I have everything figured out, when I'm just as awed by the world as everyone else. I usually hide from this self doubt, but I've recently been able to accept this piece of me, no matter how contradictory it is to the person I'm trying to be. And yet, this acceptance of my insecurity, in a way, continues to make me feel more secure in myself. Yes, everyone deals with insecurity, but not everyone is able to be honest with themselves about it, then accept it and continue to evolve in the manner that I did in the past few months. I wouldn't trade this incredible feeling for anything.

I've evolved into an individual who welcomes change. Change is going to come and I'm going to be ready. In fact, I *need* to continue adapting because I wouldn't be satisfied with my life if I ever stopped evolving. I'm monumentally eager to dive into the world and take on new self-defining challenges. I'm never going to stop exploring and testing new ground, and I hope the same for the church. I grew up in the church, but I grew up resenting it for the nature of which I was forced into it. I hope to find my way back to the church one day, but I can't do that unless I'm called. The only way I'd feel truly welcomed is if women (and all people) were considered as important as men in the church and had the same opportunities.