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There are a few things that are expected of seniors when they graduate high school: move away, go to college, and get a job. Some of us decide to listen to society's expectations and move away, while others opt to do what is best for them and stay home. I was one of the graduates that decided to leave Bakersfield to go to college when I finished high school in June of 2016. I got into every college I applied to, spanning from Northern Washington to San Diego, so I had a list of towns to possibly relocate to. My choice? San Diego State University. At seventeen, I had no idea that it would be the most self-teaching experience of my life, plus I received a pretty nice education all at once.

Lesson one of going away to college: learn how to get yourself wherever you need to go. When you're roughly 244 miles away from home, you cannot call your parents every time something goes wrong, just as you cannot rely on them to get you out of bed in the morning. If there is one thing I am glad to have learned, it is how to use public transportation. In Bakersfield, I drove everywhere outside of walking distance. Within a day of my family having left to go back home, I had already realized there were items I needed to go to the store and buy (locks, storage bins, etc.). There was over five miles between the college and the nearest Walmart, so I had no choice but to suck it up and learn how to ride the trolley. I had only ever been on a school bus, so it was a pretty big shock. I even got myself a tad bit lost at first by getting off one stop early; it took me about ten minutes to realize that the directions on my map did not match where

I was, as I just kept thinking I was close since I could see the buildings from where I was at the base of a hill. From that point forward, I knew: always pay attention to your surroundings, and know the names of your stops well. It will save you a lot of hassle.

Lesson two of going away to college: you will not always fit in, and that is okay. Majority of my time away at college was spent in three locations: the dorms, the gym, and the classrooms. I chose one of the biggest party schools in California, yet I only attended one party all year. That is okay though. I had a taste of the experience through the three roommates that I shared a tiny one-bedroom space with. I was making the Dean's list, while they were just scraping by the 3.0 GPA at a college where that was practically unacceptable, all because they wanted to have a good time. One of them happened to be in the top sorority on campus, so they were at parties almost every weekend. It is not any where near as cool as it is made to be; while I was enjoying watching movies in my dorm and talking on the phone with my friends and family back home, they were throwing up and falling into the bushes in front of one of the local fraternities. Now, for some, that sounds like a good time. For the sober roommate they come home sick to? It is probably the worst; I spent half the year away listening to my roommates looking after one another as they got sick into trashcans. Then they got to do the walk of shame to the communal showers the next morning where they would get stuck hosing out the bins in front of everyone. Word traveled fast, so everyone knew who caused the entire floor to stink. Watching them made me okay with not having friends as much, as I know I would have been the same person I was judging if I had made friends with them.

I was not a loner completely by choice though in San Diego. I quickly learned that most of the people on campus were snobby. I did not come from money like most of them did, as many of them were paying the \$26,000 a year starting fee out of pocket, so I was rarely invited

to do things. They did not want to spend their days relaxing by the pool or on the sand at the beach; most of the people on campus wanted to pay to go to the movies or go shopping at super expensive stores like Gucci each weekend. That is not what we do in the central valley, so it seemed like a waste of money to me. I was more interested in going to the beach and going hiking through the trails, but majority of the people I met were uninterested. My biggest mistake was deciding not to go just because I'd be the weird girl by myself at the beach. I ultimately learned it is perfectly okay to do your own thing, just as friends are a bonus, not a necessity.

Lesson three of going away to college: separation anxiety is probably the worst part of going away, and it can easily become something much worse than normal social anxiety if ignored. There is so much about the emotional toll it takes on a person that is never discussed. I wish I had known how poorly I would react to being away from my friends and family, as no one even warned me it was a possibility. It may have been lessened by having friends to run around with, but I do not think even a friend or two would have changed it. No one mentions the fact that plenty of students each year have nervous break downs (or close to) over being away from their family. No one gets personal enough to tell you moving away could land you in a therapy session, nor do they talk about the person that moves back home when the school year ends. I was made to feel bad about my personal choice to move back home, as my roommates and classmates did not get it. While everyone else was scheduling their courses for the next fall, I was working with councilors to set up a schedule at Bakersfield College. I learned quickly why people turn to things like marijuana and drinking; I could not even listen to music for over a year. My anxiety and depression got so bad that music put me into panic attacks, and I could almost never sleep. Thankfully, I did not see drinking as a solution and knew my best choice would be to finish my contracted year and move back home. It took a long-lasting toll on me; I

literally had to start going to therapy because the separation anxiety turned into full-blown anxiety disorders, and it has been determined to be a result of moving away at seventeen. One of the biggest lessons: know yourself and know what you can and cannot handle.

Lesson four of going away to college: always make sure you are making the right choice for you, and not because someone else tells you that you what you should do. I did not want to go away to college; I had wanted to stay put and do my freshman and sophomore year at BC to save money. My older sister passed on Humboldt University to go to CSUB after chickening out, and she made sure that I knew how much she regretted her choice three years later. She told me that even if I only do one year, I would regret it for the rest of my life if I did not at least try. Big mistake. I ignored the feeling in my gut telling me to stay home because I wanted to trust my older sister and learn from her. Instead, I practically destroyed myself. I did not consider that at the end of the day, I was the one that was going to be living almost five hours away from my family. I was the one that had to spend hundreds of dollars in travel expenses to see my family; even if I only came home for the mandatory holidays, I would have spent nearly \$300 on bus fares alone. When I listened to all her regrets and advice, I forgot one thing: I am not my sister. The biggest lesson out of my entire SDSU experience was taken from this. I learned, no matter what, never let someone else dictate some of the biggest decisions of your life.

Looking back on the experience now, I do not know that I would call it a waste. My time at San Diego State taught me a variety of practical lessons. I now know how to create a financial budget, use transportation around and out of the city, and it taught me who my real friends are. It also taught me the major lessons I discussed previously, such as knowing myself and to make my own choices for myself. Despite all that I learned from my time away, it was still the most destructive and hardest thing I have ever had to do in my chaotic nineteen years of life.