Olivia Sandstrom, known as Liv, graduated from Saint Charles East High School and is presently an art history major at NIU. School, art, dance, travel, and work are Liv's passions. After graduating with her baccalaureate, Liv desires to travel the world and work in museum environments. Liv's essay, “You Lose One, You Gain One,” provides the reader with an idea of who she is and what she values. It is a very personal essay that Liv desires to share with others.
Tradition in a Maasai tribe follows that after a boy reaches fifteen, he is initiated into manhood through a ceremony in which he wears exotic headdresses, has his head shaved, and is circumcised. In Tepilit Ole Saitoti’s story of being initiated into the Maasai tribe, he recounts a coming-of-age experience in which he has to be circumcised to become a warrior. His turning point occurs after he successfully undergoes the excruciating circumcision and is accepted as a Maasai warrior; i.e., he leaves his childhood behind and becomes a man. He is faced with responsibilities and decisions as an adult. Saitoti’s father explains to him, “For the first time in your life, you are regarded as a grownup, a complete man or woman. You are expected to give and not just receive” (Saitoti 132).

As a family, we’ve always been well off; my father has always had a steady job that paid well. We were able to have nice things and go nice places; money wasn’t really an issue. I never needed a job because I went to school during the day and danced in the evenings. Life was easy until late January of this year, right after I turned eighteen and legally became an adult. Then my dad lost his job. The paper industry he worked for was struggling due to the economy, so they let him go. Everything changed for my family after that. I couldn’t ask for money without feeling guilty. Name brand items were soon replaced with generic brand items, and the smiling, joyful faces of my parents grew to be distraught and sad. We didn’t think something like this would happen to us so suddenly. It was a wake-up call: a reality check. I eventually felt like a burden to my parents because I had to ask for money all the time, even to purchase the things I needed at the grocery store. I knew I had to do something, so I started applying for jobs. Despite the terrible times we were in, I was determined to find a job, so I could finally start making money for myself. I didn’t want my parents to foot the bill for me anymore. Although I was considered an
adult, this was a huge step for me to take, and the word responsibility now meant more to me. Just as Saitoti’s father told him that he was expected to “give and not just receive,” it was my time to grow up and start giving back to my parents too, rather than taking what they gave to me.

The first couple weeks of the job hunt went all right, but most places weren’t hiring, which made it all the more difficult. I had heard about this new, family-owned coffee shop that opened a month prior to my job hunt. I went in there one early February day with my sister to fill out an application. I felt pretty good about this potential job choice: it’s a cute, clean shop right on the Fox River in St. Charles called Arcedium. As an avid coffee drinker, I fell in love with the place. After I filled out my application, I handed it to the manager, who skimmed it and told me to come back the next week to talk. I had a feeling that Arcedium would be my future job site after I walked out of there that day.

I went back in that Monday to talk to the manager, who wasn’t there, and ended up talking to the owner. He was a nice, quirky older gentleman by the name of Dennis. He and his wife, Celeste, owned the shop. We sat down, and he asked me several questions about my past job experience, work ethic, expectations, and so on. The whole time my heart had been racing because I had never done this before; I wasn’t really sure what to expect. After conversing for a bit, he said he’d really like me to be a part of the staff, and he hired me on the spot. I was overwhelmed with excitement, and I didn’t know how to react. But I knew that this was the ideal job for me.

About a week later, I started my very first job. The first couple weeks were great. I was learning so much about the science of coffee and mixing drinks, the customers were always really nice, and my co-workers were the best. I realized that my life had changed drastically. My situation was similar to Saitoti’s, after the initiation when he became a warrior; we both stepped into the adult world, and we had to take on new responsibilities. I too felt like a warrior; I had to protect my family and myself from the iniquitous economy. I had to learn how to manage my time and money. Being mature wasn’t an option. I now represented the coffee shop and was expected to be an adult and act like one. Saitoti had to be mature to become a member of a tribe. After all, he was considered an adult as well.
Along with having the opportunity to have a job, there were things I had to sacrifice. My hours at Arcedium started to interfere with my dance schedule. I wasn’t able to go as often and eventually I stopped going altogether. I backed out of the spring musical, too, because I knew I wouldn’t have enough time for it. Then, my social life became less eventful and my love life more stressful by having to work weekend nights. I learned that some things are just more important than others. As an adult, you have to determine which things are more important, and you’ll get more out of them. I finally understood what it meant to make decisions. Things were changing for me now that I had this job, but I missed being a kid. I missed that carefree feeling that everything was going to be all right, that mommy and daddy would take care of everything.

Because I had plans to visit Europe for spring break with a school group, I figured I’d have to start saving money, which also meant I needed to open my first bank account. That experience alone was invigorating. It was a coming-of-age occurrence of sorts, and I felt mature and important. Similar to Saitoti’s circumcision, I was getting rid of that extra layer of childhood, entering that next stage of my life. I was like a butterfly about to spread my wings for the first time.

I had been saving my hard earned money for about a month before I went to Europe. It felt pretty good to know that I had six hundred and something dollars in my bank account, and it was all mine. After Saitoti becomes a warrior, he says, “I now stood with confidence, pride, and happiness of being” (Saitoti 136). That feeling of accomplishment set in for me also, and I was proud of myself. I knew my parents were very proud of me too. I had relieved them from that extra cost they didn’t need. I had done so much in that past month that changed me in so many positive ways.

I worked at Arcedium for the rest of my high school career and all summer. I think back on how scared I was that I had to get a job and how much of a breeze it is to me now. It is like Saitoti’s turning point, where he had to overcome so many life-altering obstacles to get where he wanted to be. I, too, encountered obstacles that I had to overcome before I went any further. Being able to have a job at Arcedium was quite a privilege. We were a family of sorts, a tribe of baristas that had to work together to keep a quaint coffee shop up and running. I found joy in something I loved. I had made phenomenal friends with my co-workers and the owners, and I was able to connect with the community.
through customers. It prepared me for life by forcing me to make a series of choices, managing my money and my time, communicating, networking, and relating with all sorts of people. Also, it helped me just by learning something new every day. Because my dad lost his job, I was lucky enough to find my own. He lost one, and I gained one. If he hadn’t lost his job causing me to look for my own, I wouldn’t have had the experiences that made me the better, well-rounded person that I am today.

Work Cited

Instructor Jameson Hogan's comments: This assignment asked students to find connections between an essay in their reader and an experience from their own lives. Liv expertly connected getting her first job with Tepilit Ole Saitoti’s entering of adulthood, but what caught my eye was how vividly Liv connected the responsibilities of her new adulthood with the tribal circumcision ritual and her own loss of childhood.