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School and home school

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Hi, my name is Rachel Rankin. I've been home schooled for my entire life, until this year when I decided to go to school. You know, it was kind of an extreme challenge, a radical experiment to discover whether school was like it's supposed to be in the movies. I wanted to see if I could do it and also to make lots of friends.

These thoughts are about my experience of school and how it compares to home school. Please note, that these are my personal opinions, so you don't have to agree with me, but this is what I think.

The first thing I must say is that there are pros and cons to both home school and school. Yet, they are very different in lots of ways.

When I attended school, I soon realised that school was not like the movies at all! One of the biggest things in coming to a new school was my being 'the new girl'. So, that didn't make it easy to break into the already existing friendship groups; and my coming in half way through high school didn't exactly help. But I made some breakthroughs and I now have the social life at school that I missed at home. When I was home schooled I saw my friends only a few times a week for about an hour each time, as opposed to all day, five days a week. I have really enjoyed getting to know some really cool people at school who will be friends for a long time to come.

Academically it wasn't too difficult to transfer from home school to school, although there was a lot more homework involved in school. In some subjects I was ahead of my class, while in others there was work that I had to catch up. The work wasn't harder; there was just more of it.

The biggest adjustment I had to make was the amount of homework that I had to do in order to complete the assigned work. When I was home schooled, most of the time I finished schoolwork by lunch time. It almost seems that you go to school to find out what you have to do at home. Now that I am at school, much of my free time seems to be taken up by homework.

In home schooling I had more freedom, learning the stuff that I wanted to learn and that which interested me. At school I am told what I'm required to learn, without my input. While there are some topics that really interest me, there are others that I find less motivating.

At school it's important that you can work the 'system'. When I was home schooled the only deadline for tests and exams was my understanding of the subject. The important thing was to master the particular topic before we moved on. You learn what you need to know to pass the exams at school, instead of what you want to know. You give the teachers what they want from you. Also, there is a limit to expressing my own ideas, thoughts, or opinions. This seems to be how one survives in the system and how you get a passing grade, because it is the grade you get that counts as much as who you are becoming as an individual.

The teachers who love their students and their job really demonstrate the quality of teaching and learning at school. They are teachers who are passionate about their subject areas and about what they are teaching. They are not burnt out and they haven't lost their passion for what they had in the first place or for what they are doing now. These teachers are really cool and they have inspired me to do more with my life; they neither think that school should be a police state nor do they publicly humiliate students. I never struggle to understand these teachers and I always respect them.

It's not impossible that you can become just a number in a school's system. And I understand why, because there are a lot of people and you need to keep track of them. For someone coming from a home school environment some of the weightings given to certain school rules seem rather unusual: "Don't eat in the bathrooms" and "Keep the top button of your shirt done up". I had difficulty with why they seem to care more about uniforms and bathrooms than the students. Again, I accept that, for part of the reason is that there are lots of students and not many teachers. When you are at home it's just you and you parents. You know your parents; they love you and you love them.

In view of everything that's happened this year, I think that doing Year 10 at school has been a really worthwhile experience. There have been many ups and a few downs, but it has been a lot of fun. What's next in God's plan for me?

After successfully completing my experimental year of school, this girl will need to decide which continuing, educational 'road' to take. Will 2012 have been more than just a 'school gap year' on life's exciting journey? **TEACH**

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