



Common App Essay Prompt #3: *Reflect on a time when you questioned or challenged a belief or idea. What prompted your thinking? What was the outcome?*

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Throughout my entire upbringing, I was essentially forced to believe things about the world that I knew to be untrue. When I finally got up the courage to challenge those beliefs, I lost everyone and everything that I had ever loved.

My family are Jehovah's Witnesses. Our family unit was, on the surface, extremely happy and close-knit. We had game nights and went out to movies together; we lived all over the country and even ended up in Mexico for a few years; and I met an endless number of people everywhere I went, knocking on their door and (so I thought) trying to help them.

It wasn't until I graduated high school that I knew I finally had to listen to that voice that I had been hearing in my head. I was what is known as a PIMO, which stands for "publically in, mentally out." I had risen to a position of authority in the organization, and people all over the country knew who I was. But I just couldn't do it anymore.

Even though I knew what would happen, I finally worked up the courage: I sat my family down and told them that I did not believe in their religion, and that I could not continue being a member. Their faces went blank. There were no tears. They robotically recited the same speech that I had previously told to other apostates. I was forcing them to choose between Jehovah and me.

I left my parents' house that day, and although I have sent them friendly messages and congratulations on their wedding anniversary—anniversaries are essentially the only holiday that Jehovah's Witnesses are allowed to celebrate—I have not heard a word from them since I left. They have all blocked me on their social media accounts. In fact, within a week of leaving the church, my Instagram account, which previously had over 8,000 followers, had barely 500 people left.

People all over the world, people I had grown up with, people I had considered very close and dear, had all blocked me, ghosted me, and put up an impenetrable wall, all ostensibly out of love, and to encourage me to return to the church.

I know that I did the right thing, and it has been about six months since I made this decision, but I am not happier for having made this decision. Life is much more difficult. I become uncontrollably sad without notice. I feel like the ground has dropped out from under me. Fortunately, I have a boyfriend who supports and helps me as much as he can, but I know that no one can truly understand what I have gone through.

Jehovah's Witnesses are discouraged from pursuing higher education, and I guess that this is one of the reasons that I have decided to apply to college. The other reason is that I know I need a new grounding and a new community around which to orient my life, and I believe that a nurturing academic environment could be the best option for me.

As time continues to pass, I think the outcome of my decision will continue to improve. I hope that I will continue to make friends who are outside of my previous world. I hope that I can find meaning in the world to replace the meaning that the Jehovah's Witnesses once gave to me.

In short, I know that I made the right decision, and I am proud that I had the courage to do so. But this experience has forced me to reconsider the notions of love, family, and self, and I expect that these are issues that I will consider to grapple with for years to come.