

CHAPTER FOUR

Our Time in the Gateway

*“I think we have to own the fears
that we have of each other, and then,
in some practical way, some daily way,
figure out how to see people differently than
the way we were brought up to.”*

Alice Walker

As young children, we may begin to sprout the seed of prejudice without comprehending what it all means. As adults, we often become, for better or for worse, set in our ways, comfortable with our current understanding of others and less willing to consider new information.

It’s during the teenage years—from the end of our early years to the beginning of adulthood—that we have a wonderful opportunity to expand the way we think about things. I call this period the “gateway” between childhood and adulthood.

There's so much that we learn while passing through the gateway:

- Feeling the newly found independence of going unchaperoned to the movies or shopping mall with our best friend.
- Accepting the responsibility that comes with our first paying job or caring for a family member.
- Developing our own personal sense of style in the clothes and accessories we wear.
- Understanding the role of religion in our lives and how much we wish to embrace its traditions.
- Exploring our sexuality as our bodies change and we go on our first date.
- Taking an interest in issues around us by discussing current events or joining student government.
- Recognizing the important role our parents play in our lives and all they do for us.
- Sensing what we might want our job to be in the future—maybe a nurse, salesperson, teacher, construction worker or accountant.

Our identities begin to crystallize in the gateway, and we come into focus as human beings. While we learn about independence, responsibility, dating, and other exciting milestones, the gateway is also our time to start making decisions about others that aren't based solely on what we may have heard. It's our time to expand beyond our influences and develop the judgment that, for the most part, will be the judgment we'll have as adults. The gateway is our time to sift out the seed of

prejudice and toss it aside.

