

2017 International Essay Contest for Young People

[Youth Category – Honorable Mention]

When Less Is More, Simple Is Enough

(Original)

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We, human beings, are probably the only species in the world to believe we are sneaky to the extent that lets us outsmart the nature and make it our faithful servant. Is that really so or are we in fact doing ourselves a great disservice by acting so arrogant?

I grew up deeply and constantly convinced that I was not enough. The pressure of the society was so great that as a sensitive and ambitious individual I have struggled with the low self-esteem since the age of 7 and found myself suffering from depression at the age of 16, which was just the beginning of a long battle with food disorders, panic attacks and the inability to feel happiness. It came as a surprise to me when I realized I was not an exception. In fact, I was a book example of what the rat race, imposed on us from day one, can do.

According to the World Health Organization, over 300 million people worldwide suffer from some form of depression and stress is the top health concern among young people in 'developed' countries. Facts are alarming: never before have there been so many people experiencing job burnouts before they even turned 30 and never have there been so many seemingly successful people taking away their own lives.

Once I went to the university, my condition did not get any better. I was surrounded by ambitious people and every time I spent too much time relaxing, ate too much chocolate or was not as productive as I knew I could have been, I felt like a failure and blamed myself for not being perfect. The turning point was the moment my parents moved out of the city to live in the middle of nowhere. Skeptical at first, soon I found myself coming home almost every weekend. I travelled between Berlin and a tiny village in western Poland and the huge contrast between the lifestyle in those two places made it possible for me to get my own life in perspective and to finally escape the vicious circle. When I came home, everything stopped: it did not matter which grade I got or how many calories I burned at the gym: I was outside and I was free. People kept asking me what I had there that made me go home

so often and I would answer: *everything*, which was the truth. I would sleep as much as my body needed, take long walks, read books, listen to birds singing. I was doing less, but at the same time everything I was doing was conscious and I felt I was finally getting a taste of real life. I started volunteering at the local animal shelter and through observing how the animals follow their instincts and enjoy simple pleasures of life, without constantly second-guessing themselves, I slowly learned how to live fully and be happy.

When I first stumbled across Henry David Thoreau's words: *I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately(...)*, I found them completely random. It was not until I experienced this universal truth myself that I remembered the poem and hung in on the wall in my room in Germany, to always remember what really mattered. Because the truth is that neither the advanced technology, nor being on top, not even all the luxuries in the universe, can guarantee us full life. That is why it needs to be said that it is high time to stop blindly running around, to take a deep breath and to admit that we are a part of nature. And this is what we should teach our children, instead of making them believe they should live like robots. By enslaving nature, we can move forward quickly, but in cooperation with it, we can go much further.

I believe that in the speeding world of today, it is crucial to sometimes simply take a break, look around and listen to nature, because the message it has for us is beautiful, as it whispers with every leaf rustle and every gust of wind: you are a part of the universe, you are exactly what you are supposed to be, you are enough.