

2018 International Essay Contest for Young People

[Youth Category – Honorable Mention]

Our one wild and precious life

(Original)

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“Tell me, what is it you plan to do with your one wild and precious life?”

– Mary Oliver

I can't remember the first time I was sucked into a story. My mother tells me about how, when I was younger, she would pack a bag for my older brother and I and strap me into the stroller and off we went to the library. Every single day. She jokes that I was reading books before I could even walk, and a part of me thinks that might be true. Because to me, stories are a part of my very being, a part of my soul. Today, I'm still a lover of books, of movies and documentaries, of stories. I'm passionate about lives, about people. I feel the weight of all the stories I've heard, the people I've met and the feelings I've felt. I've realised that reading has opened a part of me that could easily go dormant, it has allowed me to see people, to understand, to sympathise with humankind in a way so many people have forgotten how to do.

We lack compassion. I see it in the eyes of some of my teachers at school, in some of the people I pass as I walk home and in the sneers of my classmates. Mostly, I see it in stories: last year, a group of teenage boys watched and laughed while taking a video as a disabled man drowned in Florida, USA. In 2010, a South Korean couple let their 3-month-old baby starve to death while they devoted hours to raising a virtual baby in an online game. Most of what we do isn't as dramatic or ironic as these news reports, but we still have that itch for technology, the longing for a screen even as real life people stand right in front of us. We've become a generation of cowards, using our phones as a crutch and a mask; instead of feeling.

I'm fortunate enough to live engulfed by love, generosity and kindness; and on the basis of my upbringing I know I cannot step back and watch as millions struggle while some turn a blind eye, or worse, take a selfie. I know that I only get one shot at this, I only get one chance to try my best to make this world a little bit brighter. I'm interested in medicine and

solving problems and finding ways to stop outbreaks and to cure people. I've found that people show who they truly are in moments of weakness and vulnerability and pain, it is in these moments when they need compassion the most.

Something in me has changed this year. My heart is expanding, my chest can no longer contain this much emotion, this much love, and I need to share it. The possibility of going good drives me, propels me forward to help someone, heal, restore; and I know that this possibility will make everything worthwhile.

We're all just one person, each an insignificant dot in a vast and expansive universe, but I think what we do here matters. We all have the potential to do so much good, to be kind and smart and brave. Everyone can see it in you, we just need to see it in ourselves. To nurture ourselves until we can help, until we can look into the eyes of a child or a weathered, wrinkled old lady and tell them that everything will be alright. Or maybe we'll write, about the lives we have not lived but are very real and maybe we'll be able to touch the hearts of people in different ways. Until then, I'll be here, reading and writing, trying to show compassion and studying at school until I can be the person who can help somebody, anybody. Because that's what life is truly about, we live and we die and we hurt and we love for the sake of others. And maybe the compassion we share with one person can spread to someone they bump into on the street and eventually, one way or another, maybe it'll reach us again. And as night becomes day and the seasons change, the cycle will continue.