

2021 International Essay Contest for Young People

[Children's Category – Honorable Mention]

A Breath of Hope

(Original)

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Oxygen. If you had asked me a year ago, I would've told you that oxygen was the least interesting element of the periodic table. It isn't as colourful as neon, nor does it make cool explosions like sodium. It's clear, harmless, and all around us. I didn't care about it much, until one day it was gone.

Panic swept the city like wildfire, and as the night crept upon the once peaceful day, hospitals were suddenly bombarded with hundreds and thousands of distressed people. The streets were littered with floods of cars that carried breathless individuals, those struggling to grapple onto the wisp of oxygen left in their single tank. One hour before it disappeared, they would be told. Only twenty minutes before the meter would read zero. Then, just one minute before breath would become nothing but air.

In the heart of the pandemic, I began to wonder about the true meaning of life. Tomorrow isn't promised for any of us, so what is it that truly makes life meaningful? What makes life cherishable and worth living? Is it accumulating wealth? Climbing the corporate ladder? Achieving our most ambitious goals? Or being loved by other people? As I listened to the blaring sirens that echoed throughout the night, I reminisced on a beautiful memory. Though there isn't just one, singular answer to justify each of our unique perspectives on life, I believe that perhaps this powerful, four-letter word could help explain it all - hope. "Help me up, will you?" She asked in a bare whisper, her lungs too frail to expand and contract on their own. Dozens of little tubes enwrapped her with a frightening comfort, a comfort in knowing that she didn't have much long of this precious air. "I want to sing a song. I want to remember what music feels like, what it feels like to move freely and peacefully, without a worry in the world. Could someone play the music please?" She asked the dozens of doctors gathered around her. Her eyes never spoke of sadness, they only

gleamed of joy and glistened with hope. As the music began to echo through the grim hospital walls, the woman went on to sing angelically, a beautiful song that brought peace to the soul. Plenty of other sick people gathered around her and for the first time in forever, felt a blissful smile etch onto their pale faces. At the moment of hopelessness, the woman had something that helped her hold onto her happiness, a powerful determination to go on and persevere till the end - unwavering hope. To her and many of us, it is hope that makes life cherishable, an urge to savour every precious second of this lifetime.

And yet, most of us seem to overlook this powerful feeling. Our search for meaning in life does not have to be complicated. We are all given hope, from the day we set foot on this planet. Our purpose in life is to use it, like both a sword and a shield to make the most of our precious time. In times of hardship, we must use hope as our shield to protect us from the downpour, inspiring us to have courage and the will to go on. In times of doubt, we must use hope as our sword to cut our way through our deepest fears, for only then we can go after our wildest dreams. And in times of joy, we must use hope as our mirror, to reflect and be grateful for love and people, for it is connection and togetherness that sustains human beings.

Like oxygen, hope is all around us, hidden in even the smallest of life's offerings. Every sunrise brings the hope of a new beginning and with every sunset, comes the hope of a peaceful ending. So let's truly value the power of this four-letter word, a word that will help us all battle through the ups and downs of this beautiful journey called life.