

2021 International Essay Contest for Young People

[Children's Category – Honorable Mention]

Life: a dream, a nightmare, a lucid dream

(Original)

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Other children may have grown up watching cartoons or playing with dolls, but I grew up facing onslaughts of abuse and fearing uncontrolled emotions. Both my familiarity and unfamiliarity of *life* chased repercussions on my character, hopes, and dreams.

Is this how life is supposed to be?

I throw the question at each terrible experience I encounter — as I see myself completely naked and hit with hangers until they broke; as I silently watch my father burn down the computer; as I witness my sister crying with her reddish-violet legs stricken at a mall's restroom; as I watch over my bruised mother on my 14th birthday.

Like a child aimlessly left by her parents at the market, I still stood patient and innocent, as if yet knowledgeable of the world she was chosen to live in, questioning if such a horrible storyline had always been a prerequisite for a child to turn into an adult.

Turns out, the difficult childhood slowly built me a perspective distinct from my peers; they label as 'matured' and 'reforming'. As early as ten years old, I led my elementary school with around 4,000 pupils, spearheaded events, represented different communities, and talked with people who knew way more about life. People would prophesy that a young leader like me would achieve success later in life. But back then, I was only a child unfamiliar with life and what to dream in it. I was extremely careful about my decisions and dreams, afraid that a careless one would relive my childhood scarring encounters.

What makes a child like me dream? 'Me' who had already experienced too much of life at youth, and 'me' who cannot count the many things I want to change in the world.

Once, I woke up to another morning of seeing my mother tend to her plants. Why does she spend so much time on things that do not speak? As a curious one, I asked then received a reply in Bisaya, “Gwapa man lantawon ang mga bulak” (Flowers are beautiful when they bloom). It is precisely this phrase that made me first understand the concept of service, to dream of seeing others in their most beautiful form— no matter big or small, living or not. Plants do not talk gratitude, but they do express thanks with their most beautiful blooms. I found my dream, and it is to be of service to others.

One day on my way back from school, I silently cried at the school bus gazing at the poor sights I witness every day. I realized how hard it is for stray dogs to live in this cruel world. It must have a dream too, probably as simple as surviving and feeding its family. But we see, humans are too inhumane to even snatch them of their dream, the only force that makes them push their wheels. Animals, plants, and fellow people. We all share the same disappointing epiphany.

Life, for me, is all about dreaming— finding purpose, setting goals, and making them come true. It is the same way why we dream our dreams, nightmares, or lucid dreams at night, appearing to be influenced by our waking lives in many ways: stress, fear, trauma, medication, illness, or simply the hours we live. It is the same way my sister runs through books and breaks dawns to become a doctor for those who share the same medical condition as her. It is the same way I dream big of becoming a leader in clean energy and sustainability and an active volunteer in restoring our planet’s soils, our animals’ trust, and the abuseds’ voice. There is a reason why I live in this world, and I want to believe it is to help the impoverished regain their rights to live with equity.

Langston Hughes, a poet I respect so much, once exquisitely wrote, *“If dreams die, life is a broken-winged bird that cannot fly”*.

We had always been at the intersection of life and dreams. The beauty of life starts with how a child dreams then grows with how the creative energy of the universe strives to make them happen.

Quotation reference:

Hughes, Langston, 1902-1967. (1994). The collected poems of Langston Hughes. New York, Knopf:

Distributed by Random House.