

2021 International Essay Contest for Young People

[Youth Category – Honorable Mention]

Life makes sense when it is shared

(Original)

Marina Prata

(Age 21, Brazil)

I wouldn't dare to assign only one meaning to life, because life itself has taught me that it has very different meanings depending on who is asked this question - and that's its greatest beauty. Nevertheless, for me, the meaning of life is to discover and write about as many and as varied answers to this question as possible.

During Journalism college, I had the privilege of meeting and interviewing people who were very different from me. I learned to be enchanted with the infinite possibilities that life has of existing, seeing people who live completely different lives from mine and with whom I could learn so much. At the same time, I was able to perceive, in those same lives, so many similarities. It was interviewing Muslim girls, black activists, children with rare diseases, gypsy leaders and so many other stories that I realized: humanity is nothing more than a spectrum of infinitely diverse colors that shine from the same origin.

Getting in touch with other universes helped me to expand my own, to see life with eyes other than mine and, therefore, see it in a richer way. And the best part of it is knowing that I'm just beginning. I found my purpose in this collectivity, in studying the countless singularities that make up the whole, and in telling these stories as beautifully as I can. In turning empathy into art, in showing that difference is not a threat and brings nothing but wealth. More than that, I learned that this enchantment can be found in a culture on the other side of the world or in a bus conversation on the way home.

The reason is simple: we are almost eight billion people sharing the same Earth. And, I don't know about you, but I refuse to believe that whoever has put us all together here did it for lack of space or something. That's why it seems rather pointless to live a whole life just for yourself: living only makes sense when it's a shared verb.

Realizing this is quite significant, especially during a pandemic that has pushed us so far apart from each other. These times are hard proof that in order to live (and survive), we need to be united - even if we do it now by staying apart. For life is like a living ecosystem that depends on each cell, each one of us. We are all connected, both for good and for bad, in perfect balance. If a person chooses not to wear a mask, it affects the health of all those who will come across them; but if they choose to take the time to find a cure, then they can save us all.

As a Journalism student, I also learned that knowing and understanding the beautiful variety of lives that inhabit Earth is to understand the importance of protecting each one of them, and defending their right to exist; to protect the planet they live in and on which they depend entirely; of being your best version not just for yourself, but for understanding that the world deserves the best of you.

Life is a very personal collective work. Choices made halfway around the world can impact how you live wherever you are. And when we choose to live this encounter with others, in which we can learn and teach, we evolve mutually. When we connect with empathy, when we are truly open, when we show ourselves to the world, we contribute. More than that, we inspire others to do the same. And with each singularity that allows itself to unfold, the whole world wins.

When we understand that we are part of a network of interconnected lives and learn to value the diversity that makes up that network, there is no turning back: we will hardly ever live only for ourselves again. From the simplest choices, such as what we consume, to the most complex ones, such as how we will live our purpose, we will no longer choose thinking only about ourselves. Our priorities, our struggles and what makes us get up every morning take on new meanings. For the meaning of life becomes collective.