

2022 International Essay Contest for Young People

[Youth Category – Honorable Mention]

## **My String of Beads**

(Original)

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*(Age 17, U.S.A.)*

The values I treasure today are simply traits I came to admire through my observation of people who held those values before me. I collected these traits, modeled for me by people who did not know of the pedestal I set them on, like pretty rocks or polished beads to string on a necklace, and then I made them my own cherished values to embody.

My preschool teacher Ms. Suzie, an old lady with a river of gray hair she always wrapped into a bun at the back of her head, taught me the value of generosity. She showed three-year-old me how to draw a sunset and make the clouds look like they were surrounding the sun. I was in awe of her. She shared her knowledge, even with someone who was not able to do much with it. I once regarded her as a great artist, and now I keep her in my mind as someone who unknowingly placed the first shining bead into my pudgy hands.

The next beads on my string of values came from my grandpa. He was the pinnacle of kindness, a pillar of patience, my ultimate hero. His parting words to me, after every visit was over, were a reminder to “always stay as nice as you are.” I added a bead and made him that promise.

He jingled when he walked. He kept quarters in his pockets to divide among his grandchildren so that we could buy something at the dollar store.

I once dropped my charm bracelet into the edge of a lake when we were fishing. I thought it was gone forever, but then I saw my grandpa flatten himself to the dock and stick his arm almost shoulder-deep into the water wavering with stinking algae. He laid there, in the hot sun with his striped dress shirt on, for almost an hour, searching blindly for my bracelet. He smiled at me with his cheek pressed to the warmed wood of the pier. Bits of algae still clung to the silver charms when he finally reclaimed my bracelet and returned it to me. My grandpa left me many beads; I wish I had gotten to thank him for them.

As I got older, my string got longer.

My mother modeled selflessness, then forgiveness, and then strength. My father handed me a blue bead for determination when I learned what his work as a physician entailed, what kept him away from home until 1 o'clock in the morning and then called him back again at 3. I added more blue beads during the pandemic, for good measure.

My little brother gave me beads I had seen before, just as I had once seen his same warm eyes and soft smile somewhere on a dock hanging over a cool lake. The glimmer of his beads on my necklace reminds me to keep my promise.

My best friend gave me loyalty. My favorite teachers dropped compassion and empathy into my open palms.

The values I hold dear are what I learned was precious: generosity, kindness, patience, selflessness, forgiveness, strength, determination, loyalty, compassion, empathy.

Every bead I appreciate, every value I work to exemplify; I wear my necklace daily and live my life according to it.

Each person leaves a trail of beads wherever they go. People pick up the ones that catch their eye on a sunny day, the ones that they find to have value. I make sure that the beads I leave behind are good ones.

Kindness rolls across the floor in the grocery store when I offer my place in line to a mother and her son. The child holding his mother's hand in front of me picks it up curiously.

Perhaps my determination sparks inspiration, a fire to persevere the same. Maybe my loyalty will earn loyalty back.

I try to model the values I know are important, in case someone starts their own string. I hope that one day we live in a world that values and imitates the traits that make us, collectively, *good*.

I hope that in the end, everyone will have a necklace strung with the best of humanity.